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STEVE WEINMAN, EDITOR

FIRST IN



BEING OF SOUND MIND

MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS HAPPEN to other people, as we all know. Except that can't be true if, as the experts tell us, a quarter of the population experiences some kind of mental problem in the course of a year – most commonly anxiety or depression.

And if that's the case, unless they all walk away from the sport, you might expect there to be thousands of scuba-divers with such disorders active at any one time. But other than throwaway references to a dive-buddy being "a bit crazy" or "out of his mind", it's just not something we talk about.

DDRC Healthcare keeps coming up with new avenues of serious diving research, and surveying our mental health is its latest mission. Few UK bodies seem to do as much to decode divers' behaviour, and over the years DDRC has studied diving in relation to women, asthma, diabetes, DCI, alcohol and illicit drugs, building a valuable knowledge bank as it goes.

(As an aside, it's wrong of me to say that nobody else delves into divers. I've just been sent details of a university research project based on 15 people. It concludes that divers don't want to be passive tourists but to enjoy experiences that exceed their expectations. Who knew?)

FEW UK BODIES SEEM TO DO AS MUCH TO DECODE DIVERS' BEHAVIOUR

Back to DDRC, and its hope that we'll all complete its new five-minute online questionnaire. No cause for paranoia about data protection either, because your answers are anonymous.

I duly completed the survey, but when asked midway through if I was familiar with current UK Sports Diving Medical Committee guidance on diving and mental health issues, I had to say no. I went to look it up – but clicking on "Mental Health" on the UKSDMC website reached a dead end.

So I turned instead to the Health & Safety Executive's mental health guidelines for diving medical examiners. In a nutshell, anyone suffering from a psychiatric illness; cognitive impairment; psychological or personality problems; disorders such as anxiety that would compromise in-water safety; or agoraphobia or claustrophobia should not be diving.

Schizophrenia; bipolar affective disorder; recurrent depression or use of psychotropic medication to manage chronic pain – all are specified as incompatible with exploring the underwater world.

The only hope for those afflicted is that you can dive if you have been clear for two years or more of "adjustment reactions"; isolated episodes of depression or psychosis; self-harm; or anxiety disorders unrelated to diving.

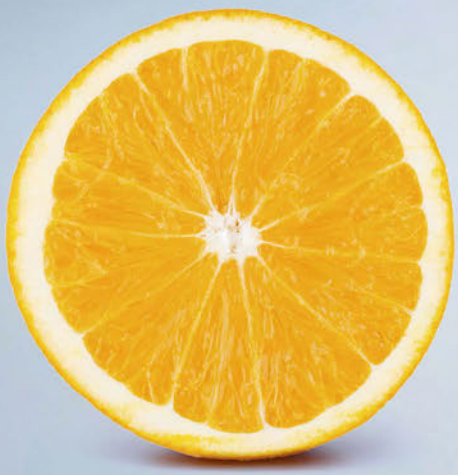
I can't recall any diving inquest concluding that a victim died through being of unsound mind, but the assumption must be that any specified condition could cause erratic behaviour, poor decision-making and a tendency to panic, increasing risk levels in an otherwise manageable situation.

According to one Dr Ernest Campbell, "successful" divers have a profile that is "characterised by a level of neuroticism that is average or below average, and score well on studies of self-sufficiency and emotional stability." But ultimately mental balance is a subjective thing – who is perfectly adjusted? Are the guidelines adequate? How many divers conceal an underlying problem?

I don't know the answers but it will be interesting to find out more. The survey is at www.ddrc.org


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incorporating UNDERWATER WORLD

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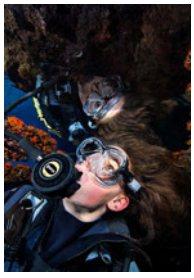
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Cover shot:
Diver in a Gozo cavern, by Tobias Friedrich



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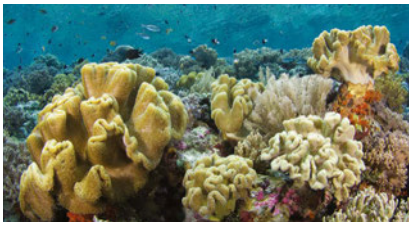
Monty MacKenzie, Dec 2014

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REFLECTIONS ON A DIVE

While I was reading the *best* magazine in the best diving destination, Egypt, I was happy to find in the results of the DIVER Awards 2014 that second place in the Liveaboard of the Year category had gone to *Whirlwind*.

I took my son Ben on his first liveaboard trip on *Whirlwind* last November. It was an emotional 21st birthday surprise for him with our club Ocean Devotion Diving (ODD!).

Newbie diver Matt (perfect hair always) Apperley wanted me to create a DIVER magazine-style pose for him, and as I love photography I was happy to help.

I moved around to obtain a reflection in his mask and I was very happy with the photo. It wasn't until I looked at the photo back aboard *Whirlwind* that I noticed that my son had photo-bombed it!

An amazing time was had by all, and we have many great photos from all our fantastic, life-enriching dives.

MARK GUNNELL, KENT



Diving with purpose

I have recently returned from an excellent week of diving in the Red Sea aboard *blue Voyager*. It was a reef clean-up trip, and on the clean-up dives the divers between us collected more than a tonne of rubbish and well over 100m of fishing-line.

There were also excellent presentations about reef conservation in the afternoons. These trips give



a purpose to the dives, and I feel I am helping the reefs after humans have dumped this rubbish into the undersea world. Is it possible via DIVER to have a feature on diving trips similar to this on which there is an environmental purpose? It could be clean-ups or surveys etc, naturally all voluntary.

There must be other places in the diving world where divers are welcomed to help with conservation projects of various kinds, and I'm sure there are many readers who would be interested in going on such trips. They "add value" to the diving by providing a constructive purpose for the dives.

I hope as a result that I will be able to go on some future conservation-based diving trips.

MATT SHIPPAM, BOGNOR REGIS, WEST SUSSEX

Discriminatory watch?

Is this for real? Take out a DIVER subscription and pick up a free watch – great idea! Oops – it's for men only, it would appear. No ladies' watches on offer – well, what a turn-off.

I buy the magazine for my partner and thought that a ladies' watch would be useful, as mine packed in last year after many years of service.

Shame on you! I have gone (against my better judgment) for the torch but really, is this a lad's magazine with no female readers? Please improve your offers.

JOYCE WILSON, FAIRLIE, LARGS

***Comment:* We've had diving watches among our subscription offers for a long time now, Joyce, and to be honest don't recall this being raised as an issue before.**

Because many women wear large watches these days we had thought of the Apeks Professional model we offer as suitable for either sex, although it is true that Apeks also makes a slightly smaller women's version.

We will of course keep your comment in mind – and in answer to your final question, more than a quarter of our readership is female and we'd love that ratio one day to reach at least 50:50!



What first aid?

Completing my answer to your recent *Big Question* about insurance reminded me of my week's trip on a Red Sea liveaboard last year.

All went well for the first couple of days, but then I was accidentally hit on the head by the base of a dive cylinder, which cut my scalp down to the bone.

Filling the sea around me with red stuff was a little worrying given the local wild life, but most worrying was that first-aid provision on the boat was next to none. The crew's large first-aid container contained only a bottle of iodine and some cotton wool.

Between the rest of us we found some gauze and tape to hold the wound together, but where divers travel alone and take up odd spaces on a boat, I doubt whether this could always be guaranteed.

I had to miss a couple of days' diving because of the injury and the tour operator really couldn't have cared less, but that's another matter.

Would it be worth running an article on the first-aid provision operators are obliged to provide, if any? If they are obliged to make a reasonable provision, are there any other instances in which it fell below the level that should be expected?

And if the onus is on us travellers to make our own first-aid provision, shouldn't the tour operators make us aware of this?

PHILIP PRENTICE, HALESOWEN, WEST MIDLANDS

***Comment:* Good idea, Philip – we'll follow it up.**

Mixed messages

Encouraging women and girls into diving must surely be beneficial to the sport, the success of dive clubs and in the wider interests of equal opportunities. Good to see therefore some pictures of women divers and photographers on your pages.

You even published a letter from a 12-year-old in March asking you to promote holidays where you can "dive as a family", and encourage "more young people to dive (especially girls!)".

But then you feature an item in DIVER *News* about a beauty pageant which includes "tests of ability to scuba dive"… I thought I had picked up a back-copy from the 1970s!



If you can't see anything wrong with this, then perhaps you need to organise or promote a Mr Adonis competition for 18-28-year-old gods, where the ability to scuba dive is a requirement. Yeah, pretty ridiculous, right?

HELEN ACTON, ORPINGTON, KENT

***Comment:* The inclusion of items in our news pages doesn't mean that we necessarily endorse or agree with the content. In this case we had run a behind-the-scenes feature by Lisa Collins on the Miss Scuba UK contest last year (Beauty & The Deep, July), so it was natural to follow up at least with a news report on the international event into which it fed.**

We also ran a Big Question poll last summer in which 62% of readers expressed doubts about the concept, so it isn't as if the issue hasn't been aired in DIVER. As ever, we aim to report as we find!

Narcosis risk overblown?

I've been reading on Divernet the article *Trimix – The New Nitrox*, which originally appeared in DIVER in November 2007 [*Jesper Kjøller reviewed the TDI Trimix Diver course, and asked if the use of trimix to reduce narcosis risk could become as mainstream as nitrox*].

I'm sure the article is out of date now, but I would have had the same reaction reading it back then as I had today.

I was a US Navy diver, went through a high-dollar commercial-diving school (only for my resumé) and then worked for many years in depths that included 170m on a 90/10 helium/oxygen (bell) mix and routinely 70m (typically a stage) on air. Yet I was never subjected to any narcosis effects or any impairment of my mental faculties.

Granted, most of my dives were surface-supplied either mixed gas or air, but there were a few non-sanctioned scuba dives – not company-related – one of which included a 70m dive off Palawan in the Philippines.

I was looking for coral and went over the side of a reef and just kept descending. Oops!

I always had the luxury of a recompression chamber on site, surface-supplied air, constant communication and competent peers, all of which is seldom available in non-commercial diving. But still I believe this obsession with scuba and narcosis to be way overblown.

We did have a diver expire when he was given pure helium because no one did an O_2 test on the bottle-rack, and other incidents, but I can't remember any of my mates commenting on any deleterious effects of nitrogen or HPNS or oxygen toxicity.

SCOTT BURROUS, WHIDBEY ISLAND, WASHINGTON, USA



JESPER KJØLLER

Scuba youth zone?

What a great idea from Arwen Rich (*Young Ideas, Off-Gassing*, March) suggesting that **DIVER** creates some pages specifically for young people.

We are parents of a 13-year-old Junior Open Water Diver with 20 logged dives. Both long-time divers ourselves, it is something we now do as a family and we want to encourage our son to keep on diving and developing his interest in the sport.

Thumbs up from us for this great idea!

DEIRDRE, DAVID & RORY BOWEN-CASSIE, MILTON KEYNES

Air to water

In response to Monty Halls' call for a divers' eulogy (*Behind The Scenes*, March), the exquisite poem *High Flight*, written by Canadian fighter-pilot John Gillespie McGee shortly before he died in action during the Battle of Britain, has been tastefully altered by Jillian Whitehead, an 82-year-old lady who still dives annually in the Maldives:

Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And swum the seas with laughter-silvered fins;
Downward I've dived and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sunlit dolphins – and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of; glided and gazed and hung
deep in the sunlit silence. drifting there
I've marvelled at the manta rays' display, then swung
My eager self round rainbowed corals fair;
Down through the long delirious azure blue
I've skimmed the swirling shoals with easy grace,
Enraptured as the chasing sharks came into view;
And while, with silent gentle current I've trod
The marine untrespassed sanctity of space
Put out my hand and touched the face of God.

DR MARGARET CLAMP, NOTTINGHAM

Got something diving-related you'd care to share? Email **steve@divermag.co.uk**, including your name and postal address – and please confirm that you're writing exclusively to **DIVER**



Diving resumes in Vanuatu as relief effort continues

FOLLOWING THE devastation inflicted on the Pacific island group of Vanuatu by Cyclone Pam in mid-March, diving centres were reporting a remarkably quick return to normal practice towards the end of that month, despite relief efforts continuing to be needed by much of the population.

Vanuatu is best-known to divers as the location of the ss *President Coolidge*, one of the world's biggest and best-known shipwrecks.

"The devastation was extensive, however mostly on land," Port Vila's Nautilus Watersports told **DIVER**. "The resilience of everyone here is amazing." All dive operators in Port Vila and Santo were "open again for business", it said.

"We lost our main dive vessel," the centre added. "However, we have already purchased another and have a large dive group arriving from Australia.

"Hotels, bars, restaurants, some resorts and most other tour operators are now up and running."

Another Porta Vila dive company, Big Blue, confirmed that many vessels had been lost, but that the island's underwater topography had been largely unaffected by the cyclone.

"We are pleased to say that some of our sites we have checked so far are not too badly damaged – only about 5% coral breakage on some of them," the company told **DIVER**.

There was a "massive clean-up in the harbour going on, with 30 to 40 boats and yachts sunk or missing".

Located "right on the seafront", the centre required a new thatched roof but "managed to survive with minimum damage – a piece of a yacht protected our shop-front for us".

On 24 March the centre was described as "almost operational – we're diving this afternoon".

However, aid continued to be delivered to many parts of Vanuatu in a bid to help residents get back on their feet. At the end of March Steve Gwenin of Global Vision International, which was raising funds for the relief effort through the Red Cross, told **DIVER**: "There are many people who have lost everything and there are cyclone refugees surviving in emergency shelters.

"It seems the aid is concentrating in the capital, initially, as tends to happen, but the small villages need it most so we're working with a local organisation to see what we can do to help."

He added: "UNICEF estimates that US $4.8 million is needed to meet the needs of children alone. They have raised $1.16 million so far."

The Red Cross reported a particularly strong response from the people of Australia, with more than Aus $6 million raised.

The Vanuatu Government estimated that 50-90% of the country's homes were damaged to some extent by Cyclone Pam, leaving some 65,000 of the 166,000 population in need of shelter and other support.

In late March, said the Red Cross, food, water and healthcare remained "ongoing needs".

Researchers want to know your mind

THE LONG-TERM Health of Divers research project run by Plymouth's DDRC Healthcare has entered a new phase – that of getting to grips with divers' mental states.

The newly launched Mental Fitness research programme aims for a "better understanding regarding the general mental fitness of divers, and any implications this may have on diving safety".

As with previous Health of Divers research elements, it involves an online questionnaire that divers are requested to complete.

Health of Divers, which began in 2008, has already looked at the effects of drugs and alcohol on divers, along with cardiac and dental health.

To fill out the Mental Fitness Questionnaire, which "should only take about five to six minutes to complete", go to www.surveymonkey.com/r/LSKYVT7

Call for help on *Baygitano* wreck



Nigel Braybrooke (*left*) with SSAC chairman Leon Smith.

A WEST COUNTRY diving club is asking for help in tracking relatives of lost or surviving crew from the wreck of a WW1 merchantman that they dive regularly.

Over the past three years, members of the British Sub-Aqua Club's Severnside branch, in Bristol, have dived, logged and researched the wreck of the *Baygitano*, sunk by a U-boat off Lyme Regis with the loss of its first mate and fourth engineer.

In 2012 the club adopted the wreck under the Nautical Archaeology Society's Adopt a Wreck scheme. And under the NAS's Lost Beneath the Waves 1914-1918 project, the club plans a commemorative dive on 18 March 2018, the precise 100th anniversary of the vessel's sinking.

"I'll be trying to locate relatives of anyone who may have served on her at the time of her sinking, especially Captain Arthur Ligertwood Murrison and the two casualties, First Mate Frederick Rudolph Richards and Fourth Engineer Harold John Chinn," says club member and historian Nigel Braybrooke, who has trained with the NAS.

"If anyone can help locate descendants or has any further information on the *Baygitano* I would urge them to get in touch via Severnside Sub-Aqua Club."

Braybrooke's work in researching the ship led him to apply for a BSAC Wreck Appreciation Award, which was duly won by the club late last year.

The ss *Baygitano* lies upright in about 20m of water and has provided the club with an excellent training dive-site as well as an intriguing archaeological project.



Connecting rods beneath the engine block of the ss *Baygitano*.

Anyone with information about the wreck or its crew are asked to email info@severnsidesac.co

Diver's discovery goes up for auction



The diamond-studded 18th century chape for Nelson's sword-scabbard, found by a diver in the Thames.

AN ORNAMENTAL PART of a scimitar sword scabbard that belonged to Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson and was found by a diver in London's River Thames was put up for auction at Bonhams at the beginning of April.

However, with a pre-sale estimate of £50-70,000, its reserve price was not reached.

The 15cm diamond-set gold and enamelled piece, or chape, would have fitted at the base of the scabbard. It was discovered and retrieved by a police diver at Old Windsor in 1973 as he searched for something else.

The scimitar and scabbard are thought possibly to have been lost in a burglary of Nelson's home at Merton, near Wandsworth, south-west London. The scimitar had been given to him by Sultan Selim III of the Turkish Empire to commemorate his victory over a French fleet at the Battle of the Nile in 1798.

At the centre of the chape are a star and crescent, the pattern of the Ottoman Order of the Crescent conferred on Nelson in 1799, and which featured on his uniform thereafter. The style of workmanship dates it to the late 18th century.

On its recovery from the Thames, the piece was listed as treasure trove and sold by its claimant at Christie's in 1981.

Nelson lost his life in 1805 at the Battle of Trafalgar, in which the British triumphed over a combined French and Spanish fleet.

FAREWELL TO CAYMANS' SOTO

BOB SOTO, A PIONEER of sport diving in the Cayman Islands, has died, aged 88.

Soto opened Bob Soto's Diving, one of the world's first diving resorts, on Grand Cayman in 1957, and developed scuba tourism in the islands long before the sport became a global industry.

Ron Kipp, who bought the company from Soto, told press: "I was proud to inherit the business from him in 1980, but I don't know anybody else who could have carved the industry out of what was here in 1957." At that time, sports scuba gear was in its infancy and there were only two hotels in the islands.

Giles Charlton-Jones, a co-owner of Lobster Pot Diving which operates out of Soto's original premises, said: "His influence has been incredible. Back when he started, the sport of diving didn't really exist."



Soto boosted diving in the Caymans' East End by establishing the Cayman Diving Lodge in 1972. He also owned the Cracked Conch restaurant in the West Bay district of Grand Cayman.

Soto was made a Member of the British Empire in 1997 and sits in the Caymans' International Scuba Diving Hall of Fame.

THE BIG QUESTION

Cover story

The question was this: "Do you take out specialist diving insurance when you dive overseas?" From a notably massive response it emerges that almost exactly two-thirds of you do, although from the comments we suspect that the operative word "specialist" was missed in a few cases. DIVER investigates diving insurance next month.

NO

"I use ordinary travel insurance but read the small print to ensure that I'm covered for the diving I'll be doing." Peter Smith

"All insurance is a rip-off. Just keep your wits about you. You don't need it." Paul Smith

"I'm good down to 30m on our standard travel insurance policy and a phone call away from upping it to 40m." John Williams

"My annual travel insurance policy covers me to 40m." Mike Bradley

"Have scuba cover to 30m with bank account." Sharon

"My regular travel insurance covers me to 30m. I claimed on it when I got the bends last year and the insurer was amazing!" Sarah Valentine

"Most travel insurance policies now include 30m dives." Adrian Hill

YES

"Most standard insurances don't cover diving." Robert Porter

"I always take out dive insurance for up to 50m diving as this is not covered by general holiday insurance." Paul Nicholas

"Having had to foot the $1200 bill for treatment in a chamber when I was (mistakenly) diagnosed with DCI, I see specific dive insurance as an essential part of any trip." Richard Boutcher

"Most liveaboards have it as a requirement." Billy Sinclair

"Only when I take my camera or do any tec diving." Ashley Cordingley

"I can't think of anything worse than suffering DCI and having to remortgage my house to pay medical fees." Charles Stonebridge

"Diving insurance spells out what's covered. General travel insurance covers it in a line or two. Better looking at it than for it!" Jim Mallon

"Should be compulsory." Ann Collins

"Most holiday insurance if it provides cover for diving is restrictive and probably not able to respond effectively." Wilf

"But would hesitate to do so in future after browsing all the clauses the insurer includes to prevent it having to pay out on a claim." James Pullin

"Having reached 70 I can no longer get a specialist annual dive policy, so now I take a specialist single-trip policy." Barry Baily

"Despite apparent cover with my bank, my insurance adviser pointed out there are so many stipulations that in most events I would not be insured for anything other than basic novice-level diving." Terry Nolan

"A friend had a problem in Egypt and needed to go into a chamber. Her partner had to wait several hours for friends back in England to raise the money before the chamber would treat her." Andrew Blunt

"Some insurances that come with bank accounts and some general travel insurances may not cover your required depths." John Orr

"The helicopter may not launch without your insurance details – bummer!" Alan Smith

Go to www.divernet.com to answer the next *Big Question* and you could win a £118 Luxfer 3-litre compact emergency pony cylinder from Sea & Sea. More on Luxfer cylinders at www.dive-team.com. Our latest winner is Nigel Vause from Bristol.

Luxfer Dive Cylinders



THE NEXT BIG QUESTION

Do you carry a back-up to your main dive-computer?

Answer yes or no, and feel free to comment

Inquests into four British deaths

INQUESTS HAVE BEEN conducted recently into the deaths of four British divers in three separate incidents off Eastbourne, Donegal and the Maldives.

Peter Stanning, from Highbury Hill, north London and Chris Mehegan, from Brentwood, Essex were in a group of 10 experienced divers diving on the wreck of the *Persiana* off Beachy Head in June last year.

The March inquest at Eastbourne Magistrates Court heard how Stanning, 44, who was buddied with his wife Diane, noted that the oxygen level for his rebreather was about 0.5 bar lower than normal. He injected oxygen into the unit, then convulsed before losing consciousness.

Rebreather expert Dave Crockford told the inquest that the unit handset had given an inaccurate reading and that the oxygen level was not depleted. Injection of more oxygen therefore led to oxygen poisoning.

The inaccurate reading had almost certainly been caused by its three cells being appreciably older than the recommended age, he said.

Four divers, including Mehegan, sent Stanning to the surface – but Mehegan then encountered a difficulty with his own rebreather. Having problems breathing and, the court heard, perhaps affected by the tension surrounding Stanning's situation, Mehegan made a rapid ascent and was found unconscious at the surface.

Martin Parker of AP Diving told the inquest that a large inflation hose had been cut to fit into a small holding. Chafing on the hose had finally allowed water to get in.

From the post mortem, Mehegan's cause of death was cited as a diffuse gas embolism caused by pulmonary barotrauma, known as burst lung, while Stanning had drowned. Coroner Alan Craze recorded a verdict of accidental death for both men.

THE REV STEWART JONES, 56, from Northern Ireland, described as an experienced diver and diving instructor, died off County Donegal, Ireland last July after getting into difficulty under water, ascending and being towed to shore by his buddy, Aaron Buick, 24.

In a written statement Buick told the inquest at Sligo Court House that the men commenced their shore dive off St John's Point in lumpy conditions and that, after 15 minutes and at a depth of 23m, Jones signalled that he wished to ascend.

With wave movement above making it "quite sickening in the water", Jones first wanted to change from his standard to his pony cylinder. "I had to assist him doing this as he was holding onto the seaweed and struggling to reach the regulator of the pony bottle," said Buick, who "hung on to him as he was moving about in the swell".

"About one minute later he signalled the 'up' sign," said Buick. "I checked my dive-computer to see how long I had left. It was showing less than one minute… Stewart was already on the way up."

At the surface, Buick found Jones distressed and uncommunicative. Jones attempted to snorkel towards shore but could not, and Buick took him in tow. "I had to stop every 15 to 20 seconds, as he was spitting out his regulator and swallowing water as the waves broke over us," he said.

"I soon realised he was getting worse as he was struggling and he was taking in a lot of water. At one stage he pushed me away and said 'Leave me'. I just grabbed him, put him on his back and swam as hard as I could."

People ashore spotted the divers as they approached shore and were swept against rocks by the swell. They were helped from the sea and, after the alarm was raised, Jones was given CPR by Coastguard volunteers before being transferred to Sligo Regional Hospital, where it was confirmed that he had died.

Expert witness Rory Golden said Jones' equipment was found to be in reliable condition but that his dive-computer had been lost, so his exact movements could not be determined.

British freedivers set new records

TWO BRITISH FREEDIVING records were set at the 6th Great Northern International Pool Competition, held at Liverpool's Lifestyle Fitness Aquatic Centre in late March.

In Dynamic No Fins, involving an unaided horizontal swim, John Moorcroft covered 176m. It beat his own men's national record of 167m, set at the same event last year.

In Static Apnea (breath-hold), Georgina Miller held her breath for 6min 33sec. The time extended by six seconds her own national women's record set at last year's Mediterranean Freediving World Cup.

Organised by Steve Millard of Apneists UK, the event attracted freedivers from 14 countries. It also incorporates the British Freediving Association's National Pool Championships.





Left: John Moorcroft, Dynamic No Fins record-breaker during the Great Northern competition.

Below: Georgina Miller, who broke the British women's Static Apnea record.

PHOTOS BY DAAN VERHOEVEN

For the British competitors, results combine with those from outdoor depth-diving competitions at home and abroad to determine the BFA's annual National Freediving Champions.

Those for 2014 were Mike Board and Liv Philip (*News*, April).

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A post mortem concluded that Jones had died by drowning. Pathologist Dr Clive Kilgallen added that he might have had an irregular heartbeat, which could have contributed to his death.

The coroner, Eamon MacGowan, recorded a verdict of accidental death.

MELANIE STODDART, 38, from Prestwich, Greater Manchester, died from decompression illness in the Maldives in April 2012, after being unable to reach hospital until nine hours after her diving incident.

The inquest in Chesterfield, Derbyshire heard how Stoddart, described as an experienced diver, was with her boyfriend and fellow diver Steve Greathead on a repeat holiday of the previous year, with Scuba Tours Worldwide.

She was on a mid-afternoon dive at Vaavu Atoll, her third and last of the day, in a party of 12 with two instructors. Surfacing after about half an hour under water, she initially seemed fine but started to feel unwell and asked for medical help.

She was given oxygen and taken to the nearby Alimatha Aquatic Resort and, when she deteriorated, the resort doctor concluded that she required recompression treatment.

However, no immediate transport was available and the nearest chamber was on Bandos Island, about 40 miles away. Scuba Tours Worldwide's own speedboat was sent from the island after checks had been carried out by phone with Stoddart's holiday insurance company.

She finally arrived at Bandos at 8.20pm, more than four hours after first falling ill.

Sedating Stoddart, a doctor decided that she was not sufficiently stable for recompression treatment. There was also a partial misdiagnosis by which it was thought that she might not be suffering from DCI.

Stoddart was transferred again by boat the six miles to Male, where she was admitted to ADK Hospital for CT scans of her head and chest.

At 2.15am the following morning, Stoddart suffered cardiac arrest and died about 30 minutes later.

The inquest heard that a post-mortem examination was initially inconclusive but that DCI was diagnosed after specialist tests found nitrogen bubbles in her blood and damage to brain tissue samples caused by the bubbles.

Consultant pathologist Dr Andrew Hitchcock told the hearing that Stoddart had also suffered a ruptured left eardrum.

The coroner, Paul McCandless, recorded a narrative verdict, where circumstances of death are noted without attributing the cause to any individual.

"It's my opinion that there were no proper safety procedures in place on these islands," he said. "For a people and a country that relies on diving for its main income I would assume there would have been."

He added that "holidaymakers need to be aware of what emergency procedures are in place should any particular difficulties arise".

Shropshire scholarship

APPLICATIONS ARE INVITED for the 2015 Georgia Williams Diving Scholarship, run by Georgia Williams Trust in partnership with Immerse School of Diving of Telford, Shropshire.

Open to people aged 11-18 and living in the borough of Telford and Wrekin, the scholarship provides a "life-changing package of PADI scuba-diving training and a range of scuba-diving-related experiences".

The selected scholar will learn to dive with Immerse and train through the year to PADI Junior Master Scuba Diver level, with attendance at Club Immerse weekly pool sessions and the chance of "at least 50 scuba dives".

The scholar will also be "an ambassador for the Georgia Williams Trust". Backers include Otter Watersports Drysuits and TV presenter and adventurer Monty Halls. Go to www.immersediving.com/the-georgia-williams-youth-diving-programme


Monty Halls with 2014's inaugural scholar, Lois Adams.

EREBUS DIVE-TEAM RESUMES ICY EXPLORATION

NAVY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL divers are to descend through thick ice in the Canadian Arctic to explore the well-preserved remains of HMS *Erebus*, flagship of Sir John Franklin's ill-fated 1845-47 project to traverse the North-West Passage.

The wreck was found by sonar search last September and a few preliminary dives were made before the winter made further exploration impossible. Now, a more detailed study of the wreck is to begin.

Archaeologists and historians are excited by just how much material might be given up by the wreck, which sits upright in only 11m of water near Queen Maud Gulf.

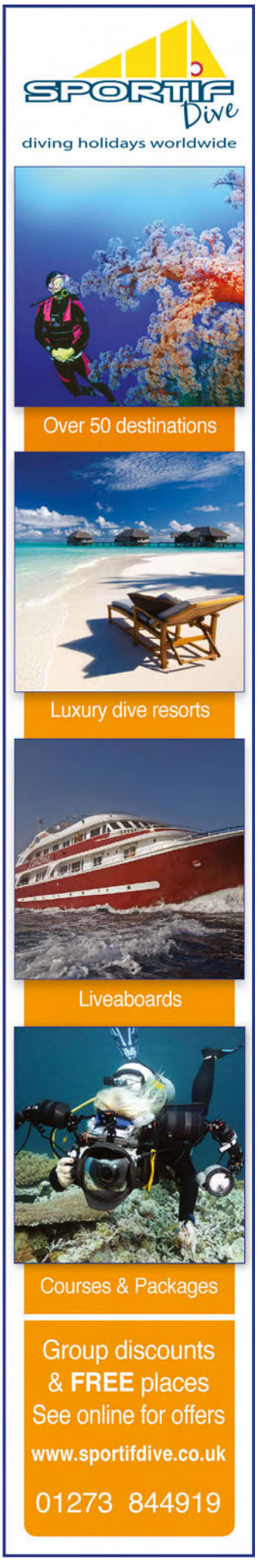
Items of equipment and perhaps even expedition documentation could be well preserved in the cold waters, in addition to the ship's own remarkable condition.

As **DIVER** went to press in late March a team was due to arrive on site in April and create a drilled-out pool in the ice before getting down to work in the freezing waters.

"It will undoubtedly be a daunting task, because the weather in April is still grim in the Arctic," Ryan Harris, the marine archaeologist who found the *Erebus*, told press. "However, there are advantages. The surface of the sea is covered with ice, so is not swept by winds.

"Particulates like sand are not disturbed and settle to the bottom, so visibility is good. Neither is the water any colder than in summer. It's always about a degree above zero."

In summer, when the ice recedes, a search will be mounted for Franklin's other ship, HMS *Terror*, thought to have been sunk in the area.



Three British divers die as other fatalities involve shark and whale

THREE BRITONS LOST their lives in separate diving incidents at home and abroad during March.

In early March, a 61-year-old Englishwoman woman died while on a club diving holiday in Malta. She got into difficulty while in the sea off Dwejra, near Gozo's Azure Window.

She was taken ashore, where a fellow-diver and a dive-centre owner conducted CPR for half-an-hour before medics arrived from Gozo General Hospital. They continued attempts at resuscitation for another half-hour, without success.

In late March Garry Merrell, 50, a staff instructor at Leicestershire's Stoney Cove, got into difficulties as one of a group of divers carrying out training at the inland site.

A PADI Master Scuba Diver Trainer who had worked at the Cove for six years, Merrell was helped to the surface and tended by Stoney's rescue team until an ambulance arrived, but could not be saved.

Also in late March, a police investigation was launched in Queensland, Australia after a 23-year-old Briton, Bethany Farrell, drowned while on holiday in the Whitsunday Islands. On a try-dive with one other novice, she was reported to have become separated from her instructor and was found dead on the seabed.

Fatal incidents among other nationals involved a freediver, a swimmer and a snorkeller thrown from a boat in collision with a whale.

The freediver, New Zealander Sam Brown, 19, sank to the seabed after blacking out as he ascended from a dive at Hutchison Reef, off Moreton Island, near Brisbane in early March.

Two buddies managed to get hold of him in 30m depth and bring him to the surface, but he could not be saved.

In mid-March Canadian Jennifer Karren, 35, was with eight other tourists returning to port from a snorkelling trip when a surfacing or breaching whale hit their sightseeing RIB off Cabo San Lucas, Mexico.

After being thrown into the sea and recovered, Karren was given CPR before evacuation ashore and to hospital, where it was confirmed that she had died. Five other people were injured in the incident, two seriously.

Off Al-Qusayr, near Marsa Alam, Egypt in late March, a 53-year-old German man lost his lower leg after being bitten at the knee by a shark as he swam. He was taken to hospital, where he died.

As **DIVER** went to press, experts were trying to identify the type of shark involved and whether there were any "abnormal indicators" around the incident site.

✹ *A swimmer was bitten by a tiger shark on the left hand and forearm as he snorkelled in wading-depth water in Hawaii in late March.*

"Fortunately it didn't like what it tasted," the victim, Dr Ken Grasing told press. He was treated for his injuries and was expected to make a full recovery. ■

Call for end of dolphinaria in Europe



Cetacean captivity: Loro Parque dolphinarium in Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife.

MARINE CONNECTION

MARINE ORGANISATIONS, including bodies dedicated to cetaceans, have urged European governments to phase out the use of captive dolphins and whales as public entertainers.

The Dolphinaria-Free Europe initiative was launched in the European Parliament in March to "raise awareness about exploitation of hundreds of captive whales and dolphins in Europe's 33 captive facilities, located in 15 EU countries". The UK has no such facilities.

Behind the campaign are 19 NGOs from 11 countries that have called for action by both Euro-Parliamentarians and governments of member-states. The public is asked to join a campaign to end shows that "exploit the animals and compromise their welfare".

"Dolphins and whales are highly intelligent mammals," said Margaux Dodds, Director of Marine Connection, a coalition member. "To confine them to a small space, remove them of any stimulation which they would easily access in their natural habitat and train them to perform for food reward is quite simply wrong.

"There is supporting scientific evidence that captivity has both mental and physical effects and that these animals are not suited to a captive environment."

Briton Keith Taylor, an MEP who co-hosted the campaign launch, said that denying the creatures the freedoms of the open sea "causes them to develop abnormal behaviour and heightened aggression as, for example, shown in the film *Blackfish*".

According to ENDCAP, a group of European animal welfare bodies and wildlife professionals dedicated to protecting captive animals, a review of whales and dolphins in captivity in the EU indicates that many states fail to meet obligations to animal welfare, species conservation and public education, as laid out by zoo laws.

Marine Connection asks campaign supporters to sign a pre-designed Dolphinarium-Free Europe Pledge Board that can be printed out, signed, photographed and emailed back to it. www.marineconnection.org/campaigns/DFE.htm ■

Victory salvage put on hold

UK GOVERNMENT APPROVAL for America's Odyssey Marine Exploration to salvage artefacts from the 18th century HMS *Victory* wreck in the English Channel under the auspices of the Maritime Heritage Foundation has been withdrawn.

Issues raised in a request for a judicial review into how the contract was arrived at will now be considered. The judicial review has been dropped. ■

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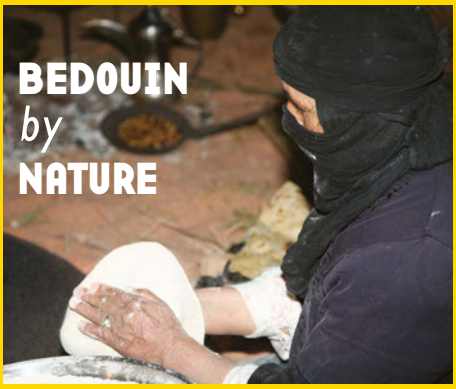
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HSE violator jailed over diving death

A SHELLFISHING-BOAT SKIPPER has been sentenced to nine months in prison over the death of a diver who was operating from his vessel in Scotland's Firth of Forth.

Last month, **DIVER** *News* reported on the guilty verdict handed out to Guthrie Melville, 60, over the loss of diver James Irvine, 42, who was diving for razor clams in March 2011 from Melville's 8m boat *Solstice*.

After a five-day trial at Stirling Sheriff Court, jurors found Melville guilty of violating a catalogue of Health & Safety and Diving at Work regulations, in relation both to Irvine and to five other divers put at risk in previous years.

These related to *The Diving at Work Regulations 1997*, Regulation 6, and to *The Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974*, Section 33(1)(c). Sentencing had been deferred for reports.

"This dive resulted in tragic consequences which could have been avoided had Guthrie Melville planned the activity properly using competent and appropriately qualified divers," said Judith Tetlow, HSE Principal Inspector of Diving.

"Diving is a high-hazard activity, but if it is conducted properly, in accordance with the regulations and guidance, the risks can be managed.

"The minimum team size normally required when diving for shellfish is three – a supervisor, a working diver, and a standby diver.

"Additional people may be required to operate the boat and to assist in an emergency [*Solstice* carried only Melville and Irvine].

"In addition, simple measures taken to ensure that the diver in trouble can communicate to the dive supervisor and that the diver is marked by a line and float, or by a line to an attendant on the dive-boat, maximise the chance of a successful outcome to an emergency situation [no method of communication existed between Melville and Irvine].

"We hope this sentence will send a strong message to the shellfish diving industry that employers have a duty to plan and carry out work properly in order to protect workers."

✹ *A New Zealand charter-boat skipper has pleaded guilty to violations under the country's Health & Safety in Employment Act 1992, which led to the death of a sport diver who was struck by his vessel's propeller.*

Whangarei skipper Mark Barnes, 59, admitted failing to warn charterers adequately about the danger of the boat's propeller, and failing to ensure their safety when in the water near his boat.

Diver Bruce Porter, 56, was hit as he surfaced from a dive in the Poor Knights Islands. He was in a group from Auckland's Western Underwater Dive Club which had chartered Pacific Hideaway, a catamaran co-owned by Barnes.

As **DIVER** *went to press, Barnes and the boat operating company were due for sentencing on 10 June.*

GOVERNMENT CONFIRMS PITCAIRNS RESERVE

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT has confirmed that it is to designate seas around the Pacific's Pitcairn Islands as the world's largest continuous marine reserve at 322,000 square miles – more than three times the size of the UK.

The move comes after the GB Oceans Coalition campaign by more than 100 conservation organisations and high-profile personalities for the Government to establish marine protected areas (MPAs) around the Pitcairns and the Atlantic's Ascension Island and the South Sandwich Islands (*News*, April).

It was hoped that at least one designation would be achieved before the General Election. So it proved, the announcement of the Pitcairn Islands Marine Reserve having been made in Chancellor George Osborne's pre-election Budget.

Fishing is being banned in the reserve to encourage the rejuvenation of varied marine species. And effective policing is now possible with the advent of observation by satellite technology.

A system called Project Eyes on the Seas has been set up at Satellite Applications Catapult in Harwell, Oxfordshire, with support from the US-based Pew Charitable Trusts. It will be able to track fishing-boats, analyse their movements and home in for identifications to be made where action is thought necessary.

Project Eyes on the Seas is geared initially for the Pitcairns but could be used in other reserves.



The Project Eyes on the Seas control centre.

Key players in the Pitcairns designation process have been Pew and the National Geographic Society, both of which joined the Pitcairn Island Council in 2013 to prepare and submit the marine-reserve proposal.

Thanking members of Parliament for "pressing this action", Jo Royle, Pew's Global Ocean Legacy manager in the UK, said: "With this designation, the United Kingdom raises the bar for protection of our ocean and sets a new standard for others to follow.

"The UK is the caretaker of more than six million square kilometres of ocean — the fifth-largest marine area of any country."

Enric Sala, National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence and head of the society's Pristine Seas project, said: "Today's action by British Prime Minister David Cameron will protect the true bounty of the Pitcairn Islands — the array of unique marine life in the surrounding pristine seas.

"Our scientific exploration of the area revealed entirely new species as well as an abundance of top predators like sharks. It was like travelling to a new world full of hidden and unknown treasures, a world that will now be preserved for generations to come."


Pitcairn Island.

TONY PROBST

Before the Pitcairns designation, the UK still had the world's biggest continuous marine reserve in the form of the Chagos archipelago, part of the British Indian Ocean Territory, with an MPA of 247,000sq miles. The US Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument covers 463,000sq miles but has breaks in its coverage.

As well as Ascension and South Sandwich, other areas mooted for protections include Chile's Easter Island and Palau. "The issue is rising up the political agenda," said Royle.

✹ *Diving industry stakeholders in 34 countries have called for "governments and international treaties to address threats to the world's oceans" in an open letter released in Palau, where the intention to establish marine protection measures was announced recently.*

The letter highlighted the diving industry's "alarm" at the "degree of ocean degradation".

It called for treaties to end "overfishing and the rampant killing of endangered marine life"; the creation of further no-take Marine Protected Areas with "30% of all oceans fully protected"; and finalisation of a "binding agreement on climate change in the next few months, capable of halting global warming and ocean acidification" which threaten the world's coral reefs and eco-systems.


Mizzen mast lying in a hold.


Examining a cargo winch.

Divers mark *JEL's* 70th anniversary

THE SINKING OF the WW2 US Liberty ship *James Eagan Layne* off Plymouth reached its 70th anniversary in March – and the occasion was marked by local divers keen to commemorate the loss of a ship so well known to thousands of wreck-divers over the years.

Divers including members of the British Sub-Aqua Club's Plymouth Sound Branch dived on the wreck on 21 March, the very day of its sinking in 1945, and a large stars and stripes flag was attached at the wreck's bow.

Organised by the Shipwrecks and History in Plymouth Sound (SHIPS) project, further celebratory events to mark the anniversary are due in July.

As part of its Liberty 70 project (www.promare.co.uk/liberty70) the SHIPS project is also working to help the National WW2 Museum in New Orleans source artefacts from the *James Eagan Layne* for a new exhibition on the US Merchant Marine, which includes the Liberty ships, due to open in December.

SHIPS is calling for divers to donate any interesting objects recovered from the wreck. "The exhibition is permanent, but I believe long-term loans could be arranged for significant items," SHIPS Manager Peter Holt told **DIVER**.

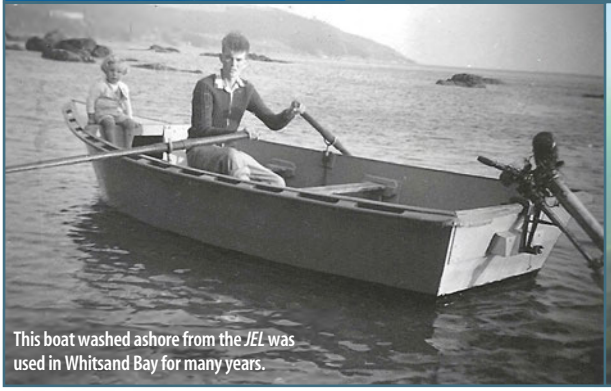
Potential donors can contact Holt at pete@promare.org.


Raising the flag on 21 March.

DAVE PEAKE. ALL OTHER PHOTOS: THE SHIPS PROJECT


Clock from navigation room.


The ship's wheel.


This boat washed ashore from the *JEL* was used in Whitsand Bay for many years.


Diver in a hold.

DNA analysis could change face of marine research

THE POSSIBILITY THAT marine life could be tracked using environmental DNA (eDNA) techniques has excited marine researchers, on the basis that it could open the door to far more accurate estimates of population sizes and locations around the world.

Results are awaited for work by the University of Salford's School of Environment & Life Sciences, which has been pioneering use of eDNA to study shark biodiversity.

Led by Prof Stefano Mariani, Chair in Conservation Genetics, and involving PhD studies by a student, Judith Bakker, the work has involved testing seawater samples taken from around Bimini in the Bahamas.

eDNA analysis works by identifying trace DNA left by organisms in the water. "All living things are made of tissue and if you break them down into smaller and smaller units, you end up with cells," Mariani told the BBC.

"Every cell of every organism contains DNA. Every time an organism loses bits – this could be the result of dying, producing eggs or losing some skin, spitting or pooing – there are cells containing DNA.

"Theoretically, it is possible to trawl water and retrieve some DNA coming from this environment."

If successful, regular screening of given areas of sea could build up frequence indictors for many species. This could represent a major advance on current monitoring of the organisms themselves, which requires long and expensive sea activities by divers and boat-crews, with no guarantee of useful information.

With a better grasp of numbers of creatures populating or passing through given areas, conservationists, fishermen, government planners and others would be able to understand and manage the marine environment more effectively.

"If this works to the extent we hope it is going to work then it is going to be a game-changer, because all you will need to do is collect enough water," said Mariani.

A key requirement is learning how to equate levels of eDNA with levels of creature presence. "We have been collecting samples from areas where we know what particular animals are being observed," said Mariani.

"We will be able to see to what extent the DNA matches and fits what we expect it to show."

LINKING eDNA SAMPLES to a precise time and place has its challenges. "Generally, the longer cells and strands of DNA from an animal are left drifting in the water, they will be degraded because it is normal for these micro-molecules to be broken down," said Mariani.

"It is a constant trade-off. The bigger the fragment, the less likely I am to get it out of the environment but the more confident I can be that it refers to that area and a recent time.

"If it's a smaller fragment, it could have been in the environment for a few weeks and reached that area via a particular current."

The research has been funded by US-based Pew Charitable Trusts. Its Environmental Science Programme Manager Katie Matthews said that, with "the rapidly decreasing cost of processing DNA samples, it seems likely that eDNA as a tool for marine conservation will become increasingly common in the coming years".

The University of Salford team plans to publish its provisional results this summer and to have a full report ready by the end of the year.

FUNDING FOR REEF REPAIR

DONORS HAVE CONTRIBUTED some US $28,000 to Grand Cayman's Reef Restoration Project, while Carnival Cruise Lines has pledged $100,000 to the cause.

Volunteers and dive operators have been working to restore an area of reef damaged by the misplaced anchor of the cruise ship *Carnival Magic* last August (*News*, March 2015 and December 2014).

Donations can be made online with the National Trust for the Cayman Islands at www.nationaltrust.org.ky – select "Donate" on the home page and fill in the Giving Form.



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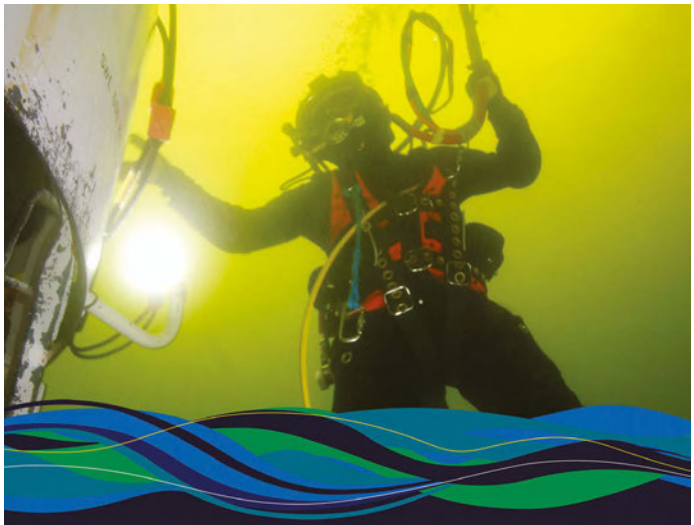
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THE UNDERWATER CENTRE
FORT WILLIAM

ROUGHING IT IN THE PACIFIC

Dive-boats come in all shapes and sizes, from the ridiculously small inflatable with 5hp outboard owned by a couple of lads at my first club to the über-luxurious liveaboards visiting the destination of your choice and the converted trawlers or purpose-built diving vessels we use around British coasts, thanking our deity every time we get our fins on the lift instead of having to climb a ladder.

Silversea Cruises has just announced that it's getting into the dive business seriously, and is offering Indonesian, Micronesian, Melanesian and Polynesian dive-trips aboard its 5200-tonne, 128-passenger vessel *Silver Discoverer*, which also boasts a bar and fine-dining restaurant, gym, swimming pool, a dozen tenders and a glass-bottomed boat. It was even built with an onboard chamber, though that's now out of use. That's some dive-boat.

The programme offers one or two reef dives a day, kept to around 20m to allow for longer dive-times, and requires you to be at least a PADI AOWD or equivalent who has dived within the preceding 12 months. Guests need to bring their own BC and regs but can borrow masks and fins, plus tanks and weights.

Packing the tux and the BC on the same trip might stretch the airline baggage limits a bit, but I'm willing to give it a go.

Living the dream

Carnival Cruises, on the other hand, has a completely different take on the whole diving thing – an underwater oxygen bar called Clear Lounge that's aimed fair and square at non-divers.

Participants wear a 30kg open-bottom helmet that sits on their shoulders and into which oxygen is pumped from the surface for breathing purposes.

To improve the experience you get a ray gun to shoot at fake fish while your loved ones stand on the other side of the tank wall so that they can see how much fun you're having.

You can even have a light citrus scent added to your oxygen if you're feeling sporty, or some lavender if you need a more calming experience.

Y'know, it sounds great, really, but I think I'll give it a miss. Thanks.

Heels over head

In Siberia the Russians have been playing ice-hockey with a difference. Teams consisting of three divers per side, all drysuited and fully kitted except for fins, and equipped with full-size ice-hockey sticks, dropped into the water through one of two holes cut in the ice to play the game upside-down on the underside of the ice.

Goals were scored by getting the puck though one of the holes, with the first side to score winning each game.

The tournament, involving half-a-dozen local teams, was eventually won by the hosts, Kemerovo.

One of the players said it seemed a bit odd at first, being upside down and under ice, but that you soon get used to it.

Plans are in place for a bigger and better tournament next year.

Parking the bike

Amsterdam has so many commuters using bicycles to get to work that it's running out of places to put them during the day. So it is considering building underwater bicycle parks to resolve the problem.

Forgive me, Amsterdam, but every British city with a handy river or canal already stores bikes under water, though I'll admit that the system could do with some improvement.

Getting the bikes back out of the canal is rarely part of the arrangement.

Mystery club-diver

Divers routinely recover lost golf-balls from water hazards on courses around the country, but Rory McIlroy provided an opportunity to go one better when he had a public teddy-out-of-pram moment and hurled his club into a lake in frustration.

The following day an enterprising fan brought along his scuba gear and, after a short search, recovered the golfing star's three-iron.

Other players, spectators and even the match commentators were a bit surprised by this, but because the diver didn't ask for permission to go into the water or hang around afterwards, nobody even knows who he was. All I want to know is whether it counts as a wreck-dive?

Fakin' it

Hard on the heels of Samsung, Project Nautilus has released its own underwater virtual reality device. It's essentially a solid dive-mask into which you slide your own smartphone and which you use in the water.

A snorkel built into the top of the mask allows you to breathe as you swim around, thereby making it feel like a dive, and you interact with the marine world through a variety of specially developed 3D movies so you really look as if you've been to Cocos or the Galapagos.

Or, and this is me thinking aloud, you could just get a real mask and snorkel, go snorkelling somewhere and interact with the actual marine life you find. I know, stupid of me.

The longest dive

A different Project Nautilus group has announced that it is intending to go for a new longest-ever dive world record.

The record is currently 50 hours, over two days, and the group is aiming for 100 over four days, while also raising more than a million bucks for charity. The dive is set for December in the Virgin Islands.

I dunno, my hands go awfully crinkly after an hour or two in the water. After four days everything's going to be crinkly. Still, if it's for a good cause…

Bottling it

You may remember the start of the recent trend for underwater ageing of wine, with several winemakers trying out the effects on the product of allowing it to mature under water.

The US Food & Drug Administration certainly remembers, and is likely to ban the sale of such wines because of the disgustingly unsanitary conditions in which it has been stored, the ocean being full of contaminants, chemicals and, er, biological waste.

Of course, every dive you've ever done has been completed under similar conditions, so when you make it back to the boat you're dripping unspeakable nastiness onto the deck.

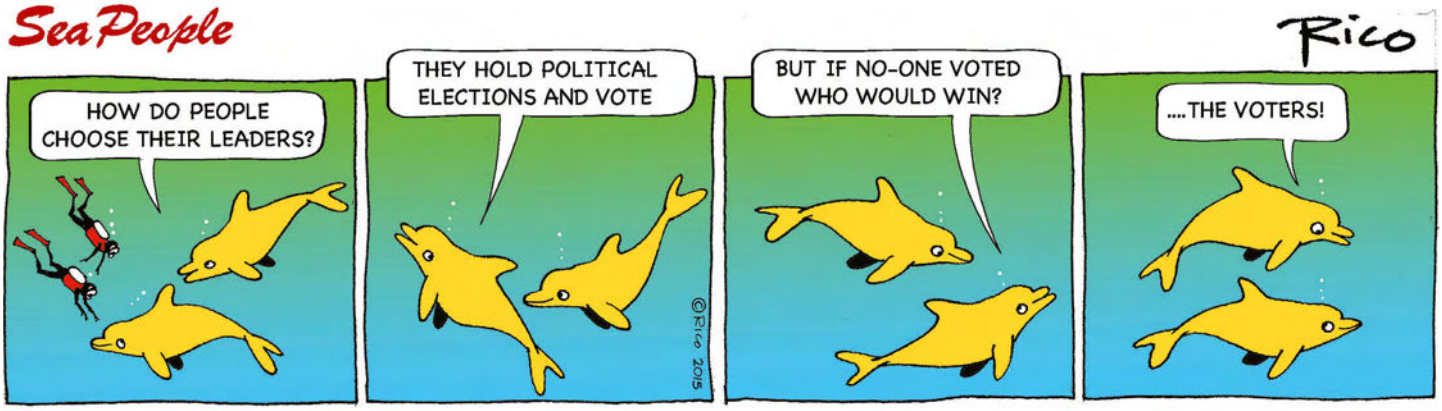
Anyway, here's some advice for the FDA. Everybody already knows that the fish don't get out of the water when they need the lavatory and we still go diving, swimming, surfing, boating and more, as we don't care.

Same applies to the wine. If we were worried we wouldn't buy it, so chill, baby.

Diving into D-Day

Diver Catherine Connors is on a mission to document the wrecks of D-Day, surveying and photographing truly significant reminders of a past without which all our lives might be very different.

Take a look on-line. This is worthwhile stuff indeed.



THE GREATEST UNDERWATER ON EARTH



MARIE DAVIES has dived many of the best places in the world, especially in the Indo-Pacific, but one magical location had remained undived by her – until now. Would the Galapagos Islands live up to their star billing?

Pictured: A turtle near Darwin's Arch.

THERE ARE FEW places left in the world where animals are king. The archipelago of Colon, commonly known as the Galapagos Islands, is one such place. Penguins and turtles play in the shallows, sea-lions zip around as marine iguanas graze on algae, and schools of hammerhead, silky and Galapagos sharks glide in the currents.

And then there are the whale sharks, mola mola, marlin, orcas and manta rays that visit every year. After 1342 dives, had I finally found the greatest underwater show on Earth?

It's the journey, not the destination – right? Clearly whoever said that was not talking about Galapagos. After eight flights and three passport controls, I finally make it to San Cristobal Island, almost 600 miles off Ecuador's west coast. Met by a smiling crew, I join 15 other divers and jump aboard for a seven-day trip of a lifetime.

Designed by diving pioneer Peter Hughes, our vessel is the mv *Galapagos Sky*, a state-of-the-art luxurious home away from home. Fluffy white robes hang in spacious bedrooms, pillows scatter over comfy lounges and the dining area is already set for a delicious four-course meal. And my home doesn't have a stocked bar, large dive-deck or a sun-deck complete with hammocks.

Our short check-out dive comes complete with a sea-lion welcoming committee, then we set sail for Bartolome Island, the first of three land excursions. We disembark, step over a slumbering sea-lion and Sally Lightfoot crabs, and make our way to the summit.

Three hundred steps later (with a few stops to wonder at the lava cacti and Martian landscape), we're stunned by the breathtaking panoramic view.

The most recognisable landmark in the Galapagos, the magnificent lava structure that is Pinnacle Rock towers high above the waterline.

We've been here only a few hours and Galapagos already feels like the land that time forgot. Next up is Cousin's Rock, a series of terraced steps composed of layer on layer of compressed lava ash that fell hundreds and thousands of years ago.



SHOW



Above: Penguins on Vincente Roca.

Left: Panoramic pincushion seastar.

Below: A king angelfish.

COUSIN'S ROCK

We descend onto a large platform at 10m and are greeted by two sea-lions. A quick circle around the group and they zoom off, just as a marble ray and a school of razor surgeonfish meander past.

Further on, we swim into greenish hued water created by a blanket of juvenile black coral bushes. Visibility isn't great (10-12m) but it's good enough to see a school of pelican barracuda and peach creole fish in the blue.

At 25m I almost crash into a green turtle camouflaged in the black coral, then pass at least eight more as we head towards the Point. Soon afterwards we spot our first shark, a whitetip, with a huge eagle ray in its wake.

As we ascend into the shallows we spot beautiful king angelfish, trumpetfish and a lone tuna. The sea-lions return to play around the shallow jagged pinnacles (and our fins!).

While we dry off to hot chocolate and home-made biscuits, everyone agrees that Cousin's Rock is a great introduction to volcanic rock diving. But when the engines rumble and we begin our overnight journey north an air of excitement ripples through the boat – we're heading to the uninhabited, untouched and legendary islands of Wolf and Darwin.







Below left: mv *Galapagos Sky*, a luxurious liveaboard.

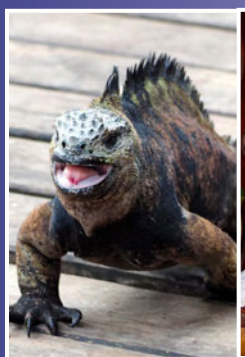
Below: The dining area.

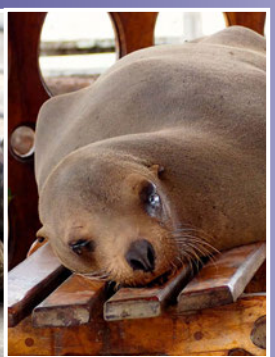


LAND DIVING v LIVEABOARD

If you want to dive Wolf and Darwin (and why come to Galapagos otherwise?) a liveaboard is the only way to go. *Galapagos Sky* is one of only a few dive-boats that journey there, and the crew was the best I've ever travelled with – courteous, friendly, knowledgeable and super-safe. The food was top-notch too.

If you do have more time I highly recommend spending an extra week in Galapagos. Dive and land cruise operators are crammed along the harbour-front of San Cristobal and Santa Cruz islands, and your only problem will be getting past the sea-lions and iguanas!





It's easy to forget that this is their backyard; their sheer numbers and combined weight have sunk many a small boat in the harbour! You could chance a last-minute land cruise but liveaboards must be booked ahead.

WOLF ISLAND

As we get closer to Wolf, birds crowd the skies and dolphins leap in the boat's wake. The hairs on my arms bristle and I wonder about the old-time pirates who would once have sailed past.

Did they watch in awe as frigates and blue-footed boobies circled steep guano-painted cliffs? Did they eye the school of silky sharks that slink alongside, and wonder what else roams below this extinct volcano?

As we suit up, the buzz on the dive-deck is louder than the squawking birds, because we know what's below us – sharks, lots and lots of very big sharks! The plan is to do three day dives and one night dive at Wolf, and naively we think this will be enough.

The small inflatable *panga* drops us at the famous Landslide dive-site. With a backward-roll splash, we descend onto a series of boulders at 10m and regroup.

Pelagics and sharks aren't the only thing that's big here – the currents are so strong, they can rip you right off the reef.

Today it's unusually calm, so we cruise over to the edge, my heart missing a beat as I spot my first hammerhead in the blue. At 20m we reach a natural amphitheatre. Clinging onto the rocks and chuffed with our front-row seats, we wait for the stage show to begin,

The support act shows up first. The three spotted eagle rays hang close for a while until something bigger scares them off. And by "bigger", I mean a school of 10 scalloped hammerheads, a giant green turtle and three Galapagos sharks!

I would squeal with excitement if I wasn't concentrating so hard on taking a picture. The current has picked up, and as I struggle with long strobes and a huge camera rig I remember my earlier smugness eyeing people with tiny GoPros. If this is a "medium" current, the last laugh might be on me.

The visibility is often poor at Wolf and the sharks tend to keep their distance, but it doesn't spoil the show.

After half an hour we let the current push us across the reef and out into the blue, narrowly missing a huge school of jack, pelican barracuda and a juvenile silky shark as we whoosh past.



Above: Aboard the *panga* and bound for the Landslide dive-site.



Below: Galapagos shark.

DARWIN'S ARCH

On the last day of 2014 I wake to the sight of one of the most famous arches in the world (to divers, at least). We're here, this is it; we're about to dive arguably one of the best dive-sites in the world.

It's also one of the few places where you're guaranteed to see schools of hammerhead sharks, no matter what the weather or season. Hashtag awesome.

We drop in close to the cliff-face and descend to a rocky outcrop at 16m, startling three green turtles along the way. The guide points upwards as a pod of Pacific bottlenose dolphins chase the *panga* back to the mothership.

Conditions are perfect – zero current and 20-25m vis. We hurry to a site called the Theatre, a natural viewing platform that overlooks the ultimate shark-cleaning station.

I check the nooks and crannies beneath me for the moray eels that I know are prolific at this site, then hold on and wait.

Soon enough one, two, three then six hammerheads mosey in, and I stare wide-eyed as king angelfish and Creole fish begin their cleaning frenzy.

A school of jack obscures my view for a second, dispersing to reveal Galapagos sharks swimming alongside hammerheads in a figure-of-eight formation. I have never seen so many sharks in one hit!

A head fills my wide-angle lens and I think, man, this dude is close.

After 30 minutes we reluctantly follow our guide Santiago along the reef until we hit a sandy channel 15-20m below us. The slow drift back is impressive – hammerheads, Galapagos sharks and the





occasional turtle are silhouetted against the white sand. When we surface there are giant smiles all round.

"Wow!" my buddy says.

"Murray," I say, "we are so far from 'wow' and so close to 'that was the best freaking dive I've ever done' as you can get." We laugh, because it's true.

We weren't to know it yet, but with seven dives planned at Darwin's Arch, the greatest show on Earth was about to get better and better.

One such highlight comes during an afternoon dive. We swim out into the blue (after feasting our eyes on more close hammerhead and Galapagos shark action), and find ourselves in the middle of what I can only describe as a hammerhead blockade.

Hundreds of ghostly shapes flank us as we drift through the middle of a large school; twisting gracefully from side to side, their white bellies disappear for a moment in the fading light.

Above: Barberfish at Darwin's Arch.

Above right: Mexican hogfish.

The fierce current drags us onwards, and soon we see the hull of the *Galapagos Sky* looming before us. Just as surprising are the 20 silky sharks on a stake-out beneath it.

I kick furiously to get closer (camera poised), but then one shark turns, its beady eye and pointed nose coming within arm's length of me.

I scoot behind a fellow-diver, and I'm pretty sure the shiver running down my spine isn't because I'm cold!

On our final dive at Darwin, I position myself next to a rock at 24m and watch six sharks cruise over my head.

Everywhere I look there are sharks. Big-eye jack and yellow-fin tuna join the party; it's a cracking way to end at what has been an unforgettable dive-site.

A few hours later we're back at Wolf for one last dip, and the infamous Galapagos currents finally show up. Forget Papua New Guinea; forget Palau. I'm thinking perhaps only Raja Ampat comes close to the force of nature that rages beneath us.

I double-check my safety sausage, dive horn and mini personal EPIRB (provided by the crew) and feel safe in the knowledge that if I'm swept out to sea, I won't miss out on the chef's mouth-watering ceviche!

This time we have to pull ourselves across the rocks, hand over hand, to the edge, greeted by our friendly family of eagle rays. They're in a playful mood, performing cartwheels and rubbing their faces onto the rocks.

Letting go, we fly across the reef, barely registering the faces of the other group as we race past. Finally I manage to wedge myself into a large hole, right next to a Galapagos shark – it's a fantastic photo op if only I can manage to hold the camera still!

The last dive at Wolf was the most exhilarating of the trip, and served to underline why diving in the Galapagos is for experienced divers only.

We head south to Fernandina Island, where the Cromwell Current brings ice-bucket-challenge temperatures – you'll be glad of your 7mm semi-dry and hood!

A dive-site called Cape Douglas is the only place in the world where you can dive with marine iguanas. We spot these mini-Godzillas basking on the shore, and Santiago informs us that once their body temperature warms up enough they'll slide into the shallows looking for a scrumptious meal (otherwise known as green and red sea algae).

The underwater landscape is like nothing I've ever seen before – a garden of boulders covered with red and green "moss" and the occasional soft coral floating in the surge. As well as the iguanas, we spot playful sea-lions and bright orange hogfish.



Above: On the look-out for Darwin's Arch.

LAND EXCURSIONS

Galapagos Sky balances out the spectacular diving with opportunities to explore the main land attractions and wildlife. The trek to the top of Bartolome Island, with its lava cacti and Mars-like landscape, is a highlight, and an optional *panga* ride around Vicente Roca cove is a fantastic opportunity to get close to the flightless cormorants, Galapagos penguins and many species of birds and reptiles.



There's even time to explore the town centres of San Cristobal's and Santa Cruz. But the biggest draw is found only in the highlands of Isabela Island, one of the few places to see the famous Darwin giant tortoises in the wild, just roaming free!

PUNTA VINCENTE ROCA



Just a short hop across the channel is Punta Vicenta Roca. Cruising into the cove, we're watched by juvenile turtles, penguins, crabs, iguanas, fur seals and many other species of bird, including the flightless cormorant that's unique to Galapagos.

The underwater terrain mirrors the high, steep cliffs and large boulders we saw topside. The icy temperature takes my breath away as we descend to 30m in search of seahorses. Once found, we hastily skirt back up the wall, its jagged layers of rock perfect hiding spots for crabs and slipper lobsters.

This must be the prettiest dive in the Galapagos, I think, as we swim past pink and purple corals interspersed with red fans and yellow sponges.

When we reach a deep swim-through carved into the rockface, we're surrounded by a thick school of salemas, small members of the grunt family.

Two sea-lions play on a ledge next to us as we hang off the wall looking for ocean sunfish. It's not until we're halfway back that we spot one hanging gracefully just off the wall in the murky blue. #win.

PINZON ISLAND

Sailing around the tip of Isabela Island, we head to the small island of Pinzon. The main attraction here is the red-lipped batfish (not to be confused with the tropical stripy batfish).

We drop onto the sand at 20m in search of these bottom-dwellers. They may have perfected the art of camouflage but they are no match for Santiago, who finds at least six. Although not nearly as impressive as a school of hammerheads, I'm captivated by these funny "winged" creatures as they hop along the seafloor.

We explore the reef wall and spot a plume of salemas ahead of us. I have to dive straight into it – being engulfed by a huge school of small fish is like being tickled with thousands of feathers!

Afterwards we continue along the wall and look for seahorses in the soft coral; instead we find a small moray and the tail of a sleeping whitetip shark.

Slowly we ascend around the corner and onto a large rocky slope. We peer out into the blue hoping to see a whale shark (though it's the wrong season). Instead, we're treated to two giant mobula rays and our first and only manta. It's a fitting end to our last dive and the manta's black tips seem to wave goodbye to us as she disappears into the blue.

I've been back home for more than a month, and whenever I think of diving the Galapagos, that giant smile returns.

This ancient land of volcanoes, giant tortoises and wall-to-wall hammerheads is a marine version of Jurassic Park just waiting to happen.

And yes, I'm going to call it, for divers who love big stuff it surely is the greatest underwater show on Earth.





Below: Red-lipped batfish.

Bottom: Pacific spotted scorpionfish.





FACTFILE

GETTING THERE ▸▸ Flights from London with American Airlines via Miami to Ecuador (15-18 hours). *Galapagos Sky* can arrange local flights from Guayaquil or Quito to San Cristobal with Avianca Airlines.

DIVING & ACCOMMODATION ▸▸ *Galapagos Sky*, www.galapagossky.com

WHEN TO GO ▸▸ Galapagos has two seasons – January to June (December-May is best for sunfish and mantas) is the wet season with sunny spells and brief impressive showers. Water temperatures range from 20-29°C, though sites such as Punta Vicente Roca and Pinza have specific currents that keep the temperature low. July to December (June to November for whale sharks) is the dry season but is also cooler above and below the water, with water temperatures of 19-23°C. A 7mm suit, hood and gloves are recommended year round.

PRICES ▸▸ A seven-night cruise aboard *Galapagos Sky* in a deluxe cabin costs US $5495pp, 10 nights $7895. Return flights London-Galapagos from £925.

VISITOR INFORMATION ▸▸ www.ecuador.travel





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DIVE AND WILDLIFE SAFARIS IN TANZANIA



Maltese club-diver TANO ROLE loves the wreck of the *Um el-Faroud* and his enthusiasm hasn't dimmed since he became one of the first to dive it. He explains why

LIVING MONUMENT

WE SWIM OUT FROM the deep cave towards the wreck at a depth of 15m, and I try to catch the first glimpse of the ship by searching for a darker blur above the white sand in the distance.

I check my landmarks (is that what we should call them under water?) and see, with some satisfaction, that I am on the right track. Posidonia seagrass sways deep below us in the current, and I make sure that I keep to our agreed depth to conserve air and avoid excessive decompression.

After what seems like an interminable swim, the wreck suddenly materialises out of an intense blue, taking more recognisable shape from the promising darker blur on which I had been focused earlier.

I savour the moment, with a mixture of relief at having navigated the journey precisely and a sense of awe as the large aft deck of the 110m tanker greets us.

This happens every single time I dive the wreck of the *Um el-Faroud*, one of Malta's prime dive-sites, and it keeps drawing me, even though I have been diving it for the past 20 years.

THE WRECK RESTS STARKLY on a bed of white sand and the impeccable visibility reveals the whole stern section of the ship. From our depth at 20m, we can see the funnel framed by the distant surface waves as well as the rudder and screw below us at 34m, cradled in a depression created by sand scour.

We reach the aft deck, take a well-deserved breather and adjust our photo gear. I watch Veronica, my dive buddy, as she hastens to clip on a wide-angle lens and adjusts the flash arm. Then we move off to shoot the school of barracuda lazily circling the lifeboat davits.

It all started when tragedy struck Malta Drydocks (MDD) on 3 February, 1995. Nine workers lost their lives as an explosion ripped through the night in the Cottonera area.

I was living in Australia at the time, but I heard about the incident when my mother called to tell me – news travels fast, and bad news even faster. I still find it difficult to imagine the national grief that gripped the Maltese islands during that time, despite my reading of newspaper articles and talking to friends who experienced the tragedy directly.

My experience is different but I am reminded every time I see the plaque bearing the names of those nine workers on the bridge of the *Um el-Faroud*, 18m below the waves at Wied iz-Zurrieq.

A documentary screened by a Maltese TV station featured a ship insurance surveyor who discussed the causes of the accident. The Libyan oil tanker was in No 3 dry-dock undergoing repairs and maintenance. The surveyor claimed that two of the holds had been filled with ☛

Above: This view with the bow section in the distance shows the widening tear between the two sections at No 3 hold.

Below right: The ATLAM Sub Aqua Club monument marking its 50th anniversary is a useful landmark on the way to the wreck.















Above: This is the first view of the ship most divers will see – the aft deck.

Left, from top: Encrusting red sponges on the wreck provide a background for macro photography of nudibranchs – this is a *Cratena peregrina*; friendly grouper often frequent the wreck; bristleworms (*Hermodice caranculata*) are common; *Flabellina affinis* nudibranch; *Echinaster sepositus* starfish on a sponge at the stern.

Below: Scuttling of the *Um el-Faroud* at Wied iz-Zurrieq in 1998.

ballast water but these, unbeknown to MDD officials, would normally have been filled with refined petroleum products – mostly petrol.

As the holds were being emptied of this ballast water, their sides and the sludge that often collects at the bottom of tanks were exposed to the air.

The more volatile compounds of the oil residues vapourised and started to leak from a hole on the deck.

This highly flammable vapour was eventually ignited by welding torches and burned back into the hold, setting off the enormous explosion. Photos in local newspapers reveal the extent of the damage. The central section of the tanker was destroyed by the blast and the ship's structure was severely compromised.

After three years of legal wrangling, it was decided to patch the tanker, tow it towards Wied iz-Zurrieq and scuttle it just outside the bay.

The idea, to create an artificial reef to serve as a diving attraction, turned out to be a wise one. The dock was finally freed and the local as well as the tourist diving community gained a new reef far larger than anything we had at the time.

I have fond memories of the day the ship was scuttled, 2 September, 1998. I took my two young sons down to Wied iz-Zurrieq to witness the event, and managed to get a few photos of them with the sinking ship in the background.

I remember being surprised by how long it took to sink. The *Faroud* arrived at the scuttling site in late morning, and it was some four hours into the afternoon before it sank, by which time some of the bystanders had given up and left.



EVENTUALLY THE LONG-AWAITED moment arrived and the superstructure disappeared below the waves. Whoops, bells, whistles, sirens and fog-horns from the attendant tugs and tenders joined in chorus to salute the ship on its way to the depths.

Of course, I was extremely keen to dive the new wreck to find out if it had landed upright and remained intact. That same evening, our group were the first divers to dive on the *Faroud*.

We had to wait until all the tugs and other boats had left the area, and night had all but fallen by the time we got into the water and headed off in the direction of the scuttled ship.

We ventured out onto the sand in darkness, our torches illuminating little more than a few metres ahead of us.

At the time powerful LED torches simply did not exist, and our puny Q-lights and Vegas barely penetrated the











Right, from top: Scorpionfish resting on railings; John Dory are common in the colder months on the sands near the wreck; octopus at night; also this gurnard; moray eel manoeuvres into position ready to ambush small prey.

Below: Posing for a portrait at the bow.

a message that was poignant because of the ship's history as well as ridiculous, as it was now some 24m under water!

Open dark doorways and hatches beckoned, but I resisted the temptation. Wreck penetration is a hazardous exercise at all times but at night and on an unknown wreck it would have been close to suicidal.

Of course, there was little sign of marine life on such a fresh wreck and we never expected to see any but, finning back towards Wied iz-Zurrieq, we did encounter some squid and gurnards, a welcome indication of good times ahead.

The *Um el-Faroud* has since become my most-frequented dive site. It is a stupendous wreck; placed just far enough out to make the dive a challenge while being close enough to the shore to make the dive accessible from the mouth of the bay at Wied iz-Zurrieq.



dark, but I was impressed by the relatively clear water.

We kept finning out into progressively deeper water as I tried to persuade myself that it would have been difficult to miss a 110m tanker. But these thoughts were still racing through my mind as the sand seemed to disappear from in front of me, and we almost slammed into a black wall.

I trained my light upwards and realised, with a mixed sense of relief and some trepidation, that we had reached the towering hull of the *Um el-Faroud*.

It was at this point that I realised just how big this wreck is – and we had once thought the *Rozi* a sizeable wreck!

I swam up the side of the *Faroud* and onto the deck. Strings of small bubbles were still rising at several points, and my lights reflected eerily from the white superstructure.

A large, red NO SMOKING sign painted under the bridge seemed to blare

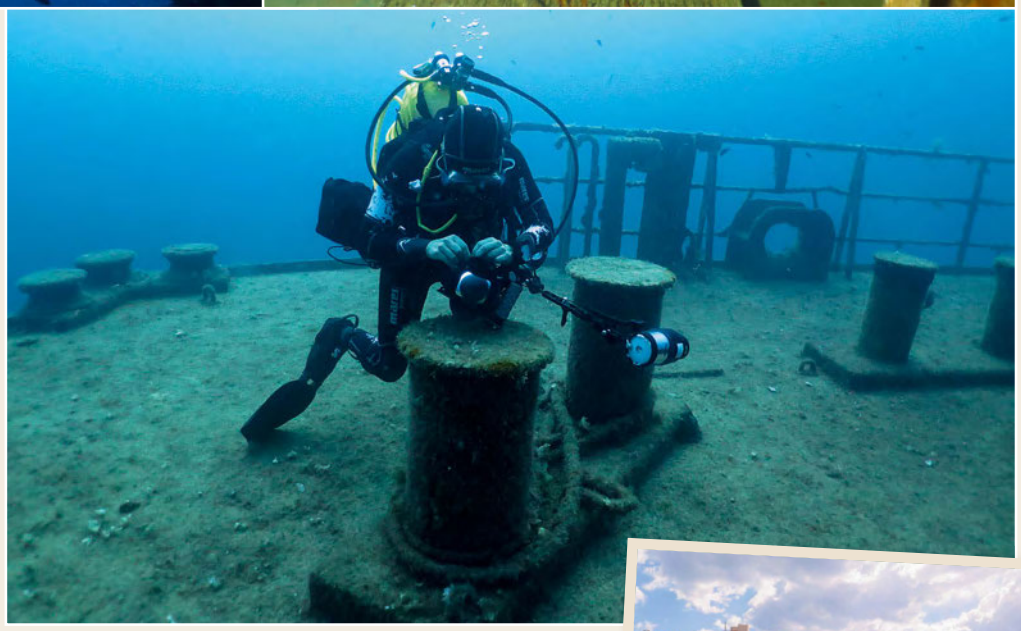
The 17 years in which it has lain under water have wrought significant changes. Severe storms have battered the ship, even though its keel is now resting at a depth of 34m. The main deck lies at 24m, while the bridge is at a depth of 18m.

THE WRECK SEEMS to have settled over the years. The single funnel (the highest part) was clearly visible at a depth of 10m and I used to love snorkelling out to the wreck and freediving down to it. Sand scour is very evident around the single four-bladed screw, which is where divers encounter their deepest part of the dive.

Without a doubt, however, the most significant structural change is the break-up of the wreck into two sections. Not surprisingly, this occurred along the tear suffered during the explosion. The bow ☛







and stern sections have now shifted and rotated so much that the port side of the bow section almost aligns with the starboard side of the stern section.

The heavier mass and greater size of the stern section has also resulted in this part of the ship settling more.

The bow section has tilted downwards at the prow. This has created a space between the keel and the underlying sand where quite a few fish like to gather in a semi-obscure habitat.

The more welcome change in this wreck is that it has now gained a patina of algae, sponges, and other sessile organisms. It has become a living, functioning artificial reef.

MOST DIVERS TEND TO BE impressed by the larger predatory fish that often gather around the *Faroud*. These include large schools of barracuda and amberjack, as well as the more solitary grouper and moray eels.

In my case I also tend to look at the smaller critters. I am always impressed by the various species of nudibranchs, bristleworms, fanworms and other macro subjects – especially if they happen to be crawling over a colourful sponge.

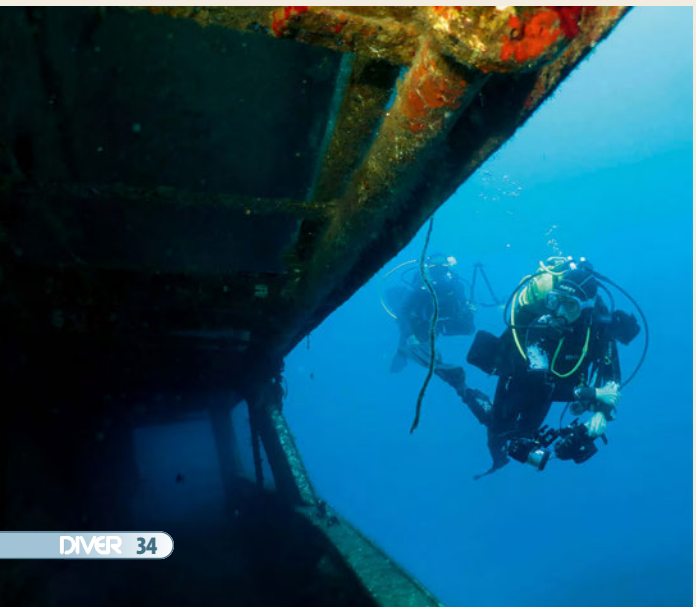
Of course, divers also make good subjects for photography, and they can be beautifully framed by portholes or anchor-chain holes.

A word about safety. Some dive-books and dive-centre websites tell you that you

Above, clockwise from top left: Barracuda; in the stern section; preparing for a photo session at the stern.

Right: By-the-wind jellyfish at Wied iz-Zurrieq, the entry/exit point for a dive on the *Um el-Faroud*.

Below: The lower covered deck in the stern section traps divers' bubbles and produces curious reflections.



can follow compass bearings ranging from 240° to 270° at the bay mouth to reach the wreck. These are fine but, perhaps because of my familiarity with the sites, I prefer to use visual cues.

I follow the drop-off, at a depth of 15m, up to the deep cave that has three openings – one above the other.

From there, I strike out towards the wreck, keeping the ATLAM SAC monument (a dive helmet) just on my left and the large boulders of the drop-off on my right.

Pretty soon you will see a bare patch of sand shaped roughly like an arrow and about 5m wide among the posidonia. This will point the way to the *Faroud*.

Of course, gaps in posidonia meadows are not permanent waypoints, so don't rely on this too far into the future, but it has served me well for the past few years.

CURRENTS MAY BE quite strong, and they tend to sweep you along the wreck from the stern towards the bow.

The best thing to do in such cases is to head towards the shoreline (make sure you take an effective bearing before the dive) or strike out at a right angle to the wreck from the ship's starboard.

The current will ease as you approach the shore and, in some cases, you may find that there is another current that can lead you towards the valley.

The shallower depths along the shoreline allow safer decompression (if that is required) and you can follow the shoreline to the valley.

Avoid fighting against the current while finning along the reciprocal bearing provided in some guide-books. Many divers have run out of air and had to surface in open water while being carried along by the current.

Some were rescued by fishing-boats, while others required assistance from rescue helicopters. Of course, the prudent thing to do is contact a local dive centre and let it guide you there.

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The Rozi Tug Boat - Malta *Photos: frankie van remoortel-cortebeeck*

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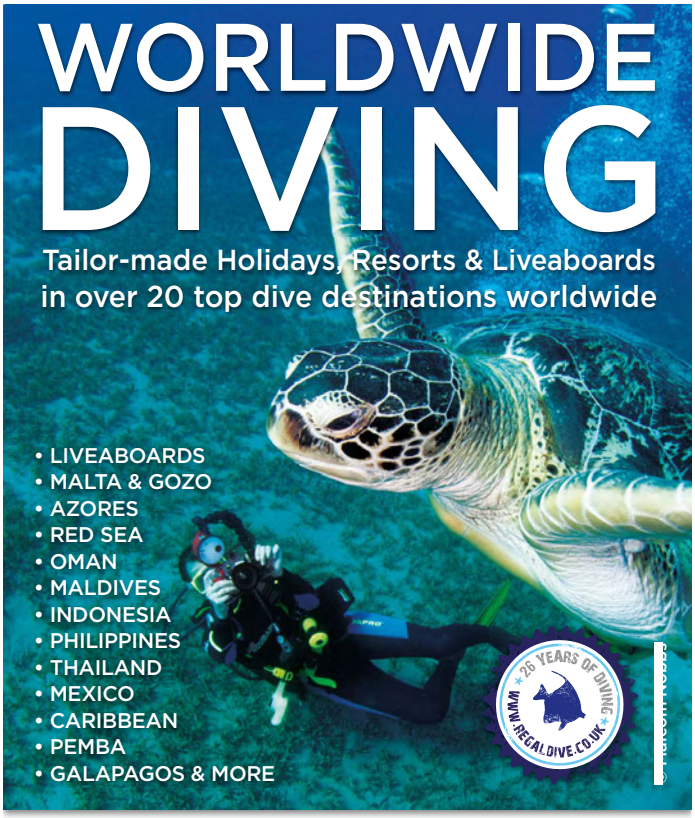
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BE THE CHAMP!



We get a little more technical this month as photo-guru ALEX MUSTARD tackles the subject of off-camera lighting. A cure for backscatter, a contrast-booster and an atmosphere-shaper, this approach is well worth the effort

*'The greatest benefit of **off-camera** strobes is the **mood** that this style of **lighting** gives to **images***

TODAY, CREATIVE DARING is no longer an act of courage, but a basic requirement if you want your work to be noticed and your stories heard".

These are not my words, but come from nature photographer Niall Benvie's excellent book *Outdoor Photography Master Class*. There is not a single word on underwater photography in it, but if you want your creative juices stimulated it is a highly recommended read.

Niall's observation is that with the world awash with quality images, a great subject and technical excellence is no longer enough to be the champ. Creativity in photography has never been more important.

Remote strobe lighting is not a new technique under water. The art has been perfected for years by the leading cave photographers, such as the late Wes Skiles and Jill Heinerth. But only recently has the technique become popular on recreational dives, offering significant potential to inject our pictures with some of that elusive creative flare.

Being a niche technique, you will be hard-pressed to find information on how to do it in any books on underwater photography.

And if you jump in unprepared, I can guarantee that a remote strobe will be incredibly frustrating. So this month's column is a little more technical as I share the whys, hows and kit for off-camera strobe photography under water.

WHY OFF-CAMERA? Remote lighting certainly endows our photos with an innovative sparkle. But just as importantly, it provides useful lighting solutions. In low-visibility conditions, off-camera strobes can provide illumination free from backscatter, because the overlap between the strobe and lens is very small.

The technique can also boost contrast, particularly for more distant subjects in the frame, especially when used as backlighting.

Probably the greatest benefit of off-camera strobes is the mood that this style of lighting gives to images. Most underwater images require strobes, which can normally light only the front of our image.

When we get the strobes away from the camera, suddenly we are able to add light to a scene in a different way, as for example when we place the subject in the middle ground of the image, framed with a dark foreground.

I have found this lighting style particularly suitable for capturing the atmosphere of wreck interiors and reef caverns.

As with any craft, photography needs the right tools for the job. If you dive in darker places, such as inside wrecks or in British conditions, you can dip your toe into remote strobe photography by using a powerful, wide-beam torch, like >800 lumen LED focus/video lights.

In bright conditions the sun will overwhelm a torch, but in suitably gloomy conditions this is cheaper and easier to use than a remote strobe. You can see exactly what the light is doing and there are no triggering issues.

Ultimately a strobe is more powerful and controllable, especially relative to ambient light. To accurately position and aim a remote strobe I use a plastic Gorillapod fitted with a mounting ball to which to clamp the strobe. This will be more stable if a small diving weight is hung between the legs.

At a push you can try off-camera

STARTER TIP

Use a trigger sensor attached on a cable, rather than the strobe's built-in slave sensor. Effective remote strobe images invariably have the source of light hidden from view, and only a trigger with a short length of cable (0.5m) makes this possible.

Shots look most dramatic when there is no sign of foreground light, so have the on-camera strobe on low power and the off-camera high.



Below: Two remote strobes in a swimming pool. Note that each is mounted on a Gorillapod and has a trigger sensor on the end of the cable.



Pictured: I mounted my remote strobe to my buddy Mark Tilley's tank to illuminate below decks of the *Kittiwake* wreck.

Taken with Nikon D700 and Nikon 16mm. Subal housing. Subtronic Alpha strobes. ISO 400, 1/200th @ f/11.



strobes by simply resting your strobe on the ground, but this is very limiting.

If we are working with a model, or have an obedient buddy, we can consider asking that diver to hold the strobe, or mount it to his or her cylinder (on the far side from where we are shooting) pointing at the background (wall of cave, bulkhead of wreck etc).

When fired this will leave the model silhouetted against the background, although we can choose to light him or her up with our on-camera strobes too.

SETTING UP off-camera strobe shots is time- and attention-consuming. Plan these shots with your buddy, making that person the focus of your dive. Practise these techniques in shallow, benign conditions.

On land, if you wanted to place a strobe behind a chair opposite you, you would put your camera down, walk around the chair, place the strobe and walk back. And then go back and forth a few times adjusting the power and angle of the light.

It's the same under water, but all of these stages take much, much longer. And we have the additional problem of kicking up backscatter!

It is crucial to make sure that your strobe is triggering correctly. You must check that it's showing up in the picture, and not flashing out of sync.

Strobe triggers easily get confused by pre-flashes, and you want to fix this pre-dive. So make sure your camera, on-camera strobe and off-camera strobe are all set on manual with no pre-flashes, and that the off-camera strobe flash appears in your photos before you try it under water.

Once diving, spend time searching for a good location for the shot. Pictures through doorways on wrecks or archways in caverns often work well.

Place the strobe through the doorway, hidden round to one side, with the cable stretched back to the door with just the trigger sensor visible. Turn your on-camera strobe to minimum power (if using two, turn one off). Turn your off-camera strobe to a high power.

Shoot and adjust the aperture until the exposure from the off-camera strobe is correct. This might already be job done, although you may want to adjust the shutter speed to either block out or let in any ambient light.

If the on-camera strobe is still lighting the foreground, you can always angle it away or half-cover it with your hand. If you want foreground lighting too, then turn up the power of your on-camera strobes. The choice is up to your artistic instincts!

Off-camera lighting is more of a challenge than standard techniques, but this means that if we can make it work, our images will stand out from the crowd.

As is often the case, when we first experiment with a technique we want to produce images that show off the technique, while over time we start to use the technique more subtly.

Both are good, and you can be creatively daring with either.

Above: Backlit coral-spawning – I placed my off-camera strobe down behind this coral and waited for it to spawn.

Taken with Nikon D4 and Sigma 15mm with Kenko 1.4x teleconverter. Nauticam housing. Inon Z240 and Subtronic Alpha strobes. ISO 400, 1/200th @ f/14.

MID-WATER TIP

Backlighting is effective on subjects that are fibrous, hairy or translucent, such as soft corals, crinoids or seafans. The technique can transform the ordinary into an extraordinary image.

The key is to make certain that the strobe is entirely hidden behind the subject, and often this means looking for a subject on top of an outcrop, so the strobe can be hidden below.

ADVANCED TIP

Inside wrecks or caverns, dive with a buddy team. Ask one to be the model and the other to carry the strobe and aim it at the camera, with the aiming light turned on.

Now position the model in the middle and, once the aiming light is blocked from your view, you can shoot. The model will now jump out from the dark background with rim backlighting.

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VISION VARIABILITY



Divers require a lot of things from the humble mask, but a decent view shouldn't be too much to ask for – should it? Stand by for an eye-opener as NIGEL WADE compares 22 fields of view – the results are there for all to see

A MASK IS OUR "WINDOW TO THE underwater world", they say – an essential item with a simple job to do. Selecting a model that suits your needs can be daunting, however, because there are probably more variants in mask design than in any other dive-kit item.

The overriding factor to consider is fit. Forget about style and colour initially and concentrate on finding a model that fits your face shape and size. A mask that doesn't fit is about as useful as a button on a sock, and an ill-fitting one will leak and steam up, making your dives a hateful experience.

You need to try a mask on in the shop and get expert advice rather than get the same mask as your buddy or search blindly online. Here is everything you needed to know but were afraid to ask:

LENSES

There are two basic lens variants, twin or single. Single-lens masks have no frame construction between the eyes so can give a better view, but it's not possible to replace them with prescriptive versions, as you can with twin-lens models.

There are also masks with extra side lenses to boost peripheral vision, and these tend to be bigger in size and profile.

Glass specification, lens shape and special coating options also need consideration. The glass must be tempered, and this is usually marked on the lens as a "T" or the word "Tempered".

Standard glass can shatter into razor-edged shards but tempered glass is treated to increase its strength. When it shatters it forms larger, granulated pieces with rounder edges, reducing risk of injury.

Standard tempered glass contains impurities including iron. This gives the glass a slightly green hue and can reduce light transmission.

Removing the iron content allows more light to pass through, giving a clearer view; such lenses are normally referred to as "Ultra Clear" or "St Gobain" glass, but are more expensive.

You can choose from teardrop, square and rounded lenses. An elongated reversed teardrop is very popular in modern masks and helps you see items in your chest and waist areas, such as instrument consoles. A wider rectangular or rounded shape is better for lateral vision.

You can also obtain specially coated lenses for certain models. These may be made from high-grade optical glass with the additional coatings further reducing the amount of light reflected away from the eyes.

FRAMES

Framed masks form a rigid structure with skirt, strap-buckles and lenses attached to it. The frame offers infinite colour options and can be dismantled for cleaning, repair or to fit prescription lenses. It can cause discomfort if, like me, you have an oversized nose that can come into contact with the base.

The alternative, frameless masks, have the lenses moulded directly into the silicon skirt with the buckle mount forming part of the skirt. This creates a very streamlined profile that can be folded in on itself for packing, or tucking into a BC pocket as a spare.

Frameless mask lenses can't be replaced if they break or a prescriptive version is required. They are usually single-lens designs, as the glass itself provides the mask's rigidity.



SKIRTS

The skirt is there to keep water out and the air in. It also encompasses the nose and needs to be soft enough to allow for easy nose-pinching when equalising your air spaces, so it must be able to mould itself around your features.

To this end soft silicon is the best material, with manufacturers vying to find innovative ways of maximising the sealing properties through differing grades or thicknesses of super-soft silicon, or even building a secondary seal into the skirt.

Some skirts use a silicon additive to reduce the damaging effects of UV light and prolong the mask's life.

You can choose a clear or opaque (usually black) skirt. The former will let in more light, so the wearing experience is brighter and less claustrophobic.

Opaque skirts are preferred by underwater photographers, who don't want stray light causing them to see their eyes reflected in the lenses when looking through camera viewfinders.

STRAPS & BUCKLES

A silicon head-strap holds the mask in position and maintaining the seal between skirt and face. Everyone is different so this needs to be adjustable, and to have a degree of stretch to avoid restricting movement or affecting the integrity of the seal.

Various designs are available, either supplied with the mask or as an after-market replacement. Silicon straps can be annoying, especially for divers with long hair, because it can get tangled in the strap and making removing the mask painful.



An alternative is a neoprene "slapstrap" with adjustable webbing or Velcro fastenings (*above*).

The straps are connected to the mask by a buckle attached to either the frame or skirt, with some versions swivelling to add flexibility and allow the strap to be positioned correctly just above the ears.

Buckles are usually fitted with a spring-loaded locking mechanism to keep the strap in position and stop it loosening during the dive.

VOLUME

The internal volume of a mask is the confined airspace created when it's sealed to the face. The larger this is, the more it's subject to compression on descent, needing more air and effort to equalise.

Freedivers see very low internal volume as a crucial factor, as they have to use air held in their lungs to equalise and reduce their breath-hold time.

A low-volume mask generally places the lenses closer to the eyes and increases the field of view, and is much easier to purge.

FIELD OF VIEW (FOV)

The amount of the underwater world you can see through a mask is often referred to as the field of view, or FOV, and such factors as lens shape, size, glass material, internal volume and rake all come into play in determining this.

The rake is the angle at which the frame or lens sits in relation to the face. By bringing the bottom of the mask closer to the diver's cheeks the frame becomes less visible and allows for easier viewing of instruments.

Reversed teardrop-shaped lenses also aid in this department. Wide single-lens masks generally offer the best peripheral vision.

Some divers actually prefer a narrower field of view, especially when hunting for macro subjects. Their focus can be concentrated on a smaller area, making tiny critters easier to find.

Reef nuts like me prefer as wide an angle of view as possible so that the whole scene can be enjoyed at a glance. What matters to everyone is an uninterrupted view downwards, so critical information from instruments can be easily seen.

FOG PREVENTION

When masks are made the silicon skirts are injection-moulded, and to stop the silicon sticking to the inside surfaces of the moulds an oily chemical release agent is applied.

This ends up coating the skirt and strap and invariably ends up coating the lenses. This causes the glass to become hydrophobic, which prevents water from adhering.

A warm wet face and a cooler water environment will make the glass steam up. What's needed is a fine coating of water that's transparent and won't run off or form droplets, thereby stopping this fog from forming in the first place.

A detergent-based liquid will break the surface tension of the water and allow the glass to stay coated, but the release agent needs to be removed first. The best method is to scrub the inside surfaces with toothpaste. This needs to be done to all new masks and repeated several times before you can enjoy fog-free diving.



A worrying modern trend is to try to burn off the release agent with a cigarette lighter. This is bad news. The locally intense heat retempers the glass in small areas, weakening it immensely, so don't do it!

After cleaning the lenses with toothpaste a propriety liquid mask de-fogging agent such as Sea Drops can be applied just before a dive to break the surface tension. Johnsons Baby Shampoo is cheap, works a treat and won't bring tears to your eyes.

TUSA produces a stick-on plastic film for certain mask models and I'm informed that this stops fogging completely.

THE TESTS

I asked mask manufacturers for samples covering the widest spectrum of design and genre in the marketplace. My choice process proved what a confusing task mask selection could be. I settled on the 22 models showcased below, but could easily have had 50 or 60.

I devised a method of measuring the field of view to compare differing styles and models (*below*).



I set up a matrix with numbers (not measured distance) set on two axes, one vertical and one horizontal, to record how many numbers I could view through each mask.

For consistency I used a measuring stick from my chin to the matrix, so my position remained the same throughout. The results need to be read in context with this test feature alone and are for comparison purposes only.

IN THE POOL

Sue Coffey and Martin Weddell of Berkshire-based Divecrew (www.divecrew.co.uk) generously offered me their pool time and two of their crew to take the masks under water. Jackie Austerbury and Andy Harfield are divers with differing facial shapes and sizes, and inevitably they found some models an extremely poor fit while others were perfect.

Divemaster Jackie's long hair was a constant problem, getting caught in the straps and buckles when donning and doffing the masks. She uses a neoprene strap on her own mask.

I spent a few days scrubbing the 22 masks with toothpaste, a Herculean effort that left me without fingerprints. Our results proved that this essential task needs to be performed more than once, although with a bit of baby shampoo and perseverance we were able to enjoy fog-free diving.

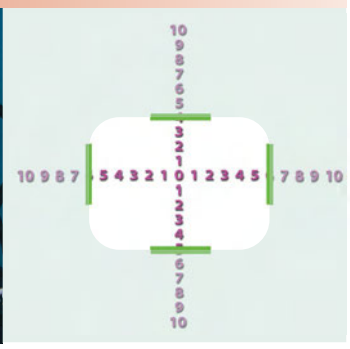
The masks are arranged in ascending price order, and all are unisex unless otherwise stated. The field of view is shown on the right – which suits you?

SubGear Mini Vu £23



The Mini Vu is a twin-lens framed model designed to fit teenage or female divers with smaller faces. The inverted-teardrop lenses are made from tempered glass set in a rigid frame. The skirt uses quite a firm silicon and, like all the models here, has a twin sealing flange to increase surface area on the inside. Tightest FOV of all the masks tested. Buckles attach directly to the skirt and have a quick-release swivel and lift-to-release mechanism to adjust or lock the strap. The Mini Vu has a clear skirt and two colour options.



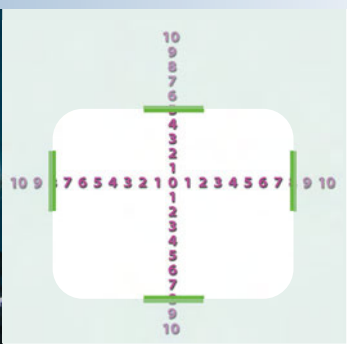


IST Chameleon £36



This framed twin-lens mask has a hypoallergenic liquid-injected silicon skirt, which IST says has been designed to avoid allergic reactions and is built to fit a wide range of facial profiles. The tempered lenses are an inverted teardrop shape and provide good all-round vision; the frame is raked to enhance the lower vertical view. The Chameleon is available with a clear silicon skirt and four frame colour options. Snap-on ornamental frame pieces are included to add a touch of individuality to each mask.



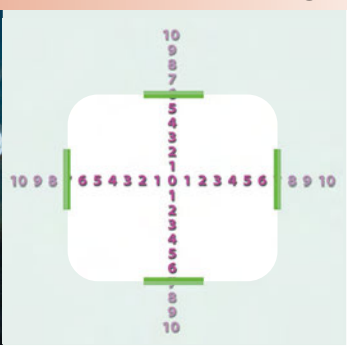


SubGear Steel Comp £37



This twin-lens frameless mask for freedivers has a small profile and very low volume, putting the Ultra Clear lenses closer to the eyes and increasing the field of view. The soft-silicon skirt compresses as the ambient pressure increases, negating the need to constantly equalise. As the skirt compresses the mask bends and distorts the lenses, so it is unsuitable for scuba-divers. The buckles have a quick-release swivel and are attached directly to the skirt. The Steel Comp comes in either all-clear, all-white or all-black.

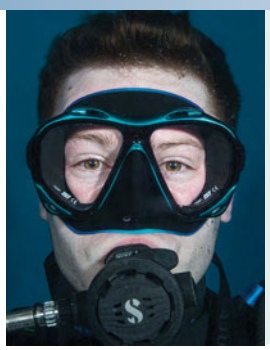


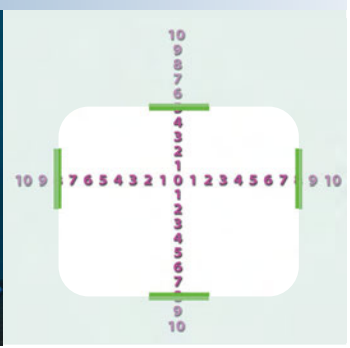


IST Chameleon Ultra Clear £40



The twin-lens Chameleon mask shown above is also available with Ultra Clear lenses. This model is identical to the standard Chameleon except that it has a black silicon skirt with a choice of two frame colours. Again, snap-on ornamental frame pieces are included.



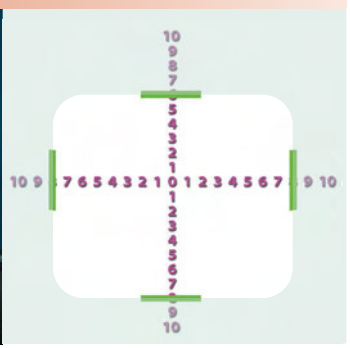


Scubapro Solo £40



The Solo is a frameless single-lens mask with a large rounded shape. The tempered lens is quite wide and is moulded directly into the silicon skirt with a coloured accent around the lens edge. The mask is slightly raked towards the bottom to enhance the downward view and is held close to the eyes, reducing internal volume. The soft silicon strap has the twin-button press-to-release buckles fitted directly to it. The strap has a large 3D pad at the back. The Solo has black or clear skirts and three colour options.



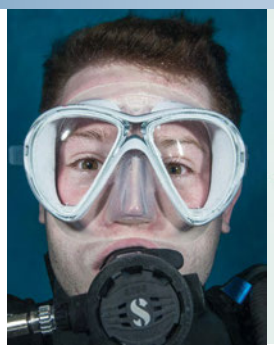


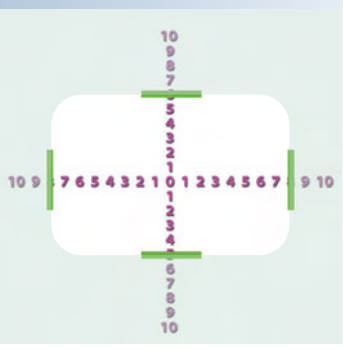
Mares X-VU LiquidSkin Sunrise

£49



This is a twin-lens, tempered-glass, framed design with a LiquidSkin skirt comprising two grades of silicon. One is coloured and firm for support, the other clear, soft and elastic for a better seal. The softer silicon is also injection-moulded in the nose-pocket, with moulded ridges to stop it collapsing. The bi-silicon mask-strap has a 3D anatomical back to hug the head, and the buckles fit directly to the skirt. The Sunrise comes with a black and grey or clear and white skirt and five more colour frame options. Corrective lenses are available.





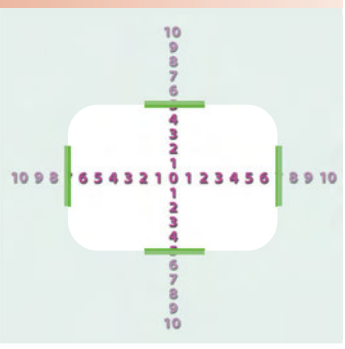
Aqua Lung Look HD

£50



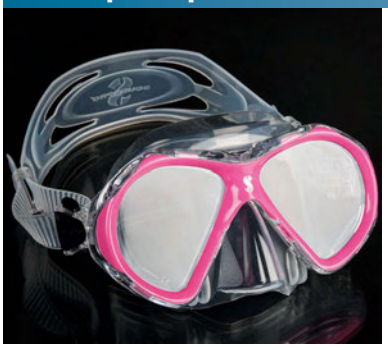
The rugged techno-polymer frame on this twin-lens mask is reinforced with inorganic fibres and a stainless-steel torsion bar to stop it flexing and placing the lenses out of alignment, so preventing distortion. The mask has a soft silicon skirt with bands of differing textures for a better seal. Cardanic buckles that swivel up, down, in and out are fitted to the frame. The 4mm-thick lenses are made from standard tempered glass. The mask is available in all-black or with a clear skirt with black and white frame.





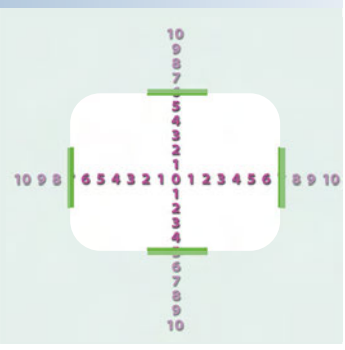
Scubapro Spectra Mini

£50



This twin-lens framed mask has a smaller shape and skirt to suit female and young divers, or anyone with a smaller face. The tempered lenses are a compact inverted teardrop shape set into a transparent frame with coloured insert. The skirt is of injection-moulded silicon with strap-buckles attached. These have two press-to-release buttons. The silicon strap has a large rear section that stretches to fit the contours of the head. The Mini has a clear skirt and four colour combos, or a black skirt with silver inserts.





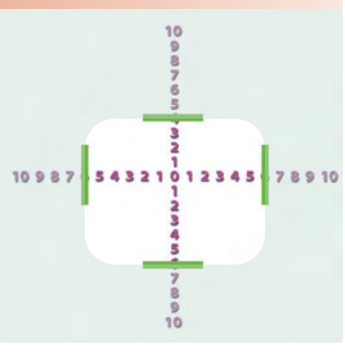
Cressi Nano

£55



The Nano is a twin-lens framed mask intended to be used for freediving and spearfishing. This "super compact" model minimises internal volume. The raked, tempered glass lenses have an inverted teardrop shape but gave quite a tight field of view. Buckles are attached to the frame via flexible tabs so can swivel up and down and in and out. The Nano Crystal is available with a clear skirt in six colour options and the Nano Black sports a black skirt in four colour options.





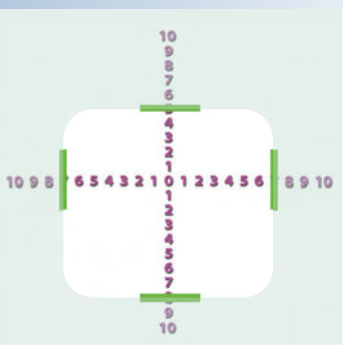
Oceanic Cyanea

£55



Oceanic says its design team has focused on addressing common mask problems, such as restricted field of vision, discomfort and where to stick your snorkel. The lenses use Ultra Clear optical glass and are shaped and raked to gain the best FOV. The skirt is made from liquid silicon with a ridged and feathered edge to provide crease resistance. The strap is an elasticated ski-goggle design with a built-in loop to retain the snorkel. The Cyanea comes with clear or black skirts with seven strap and frame colour combinations.





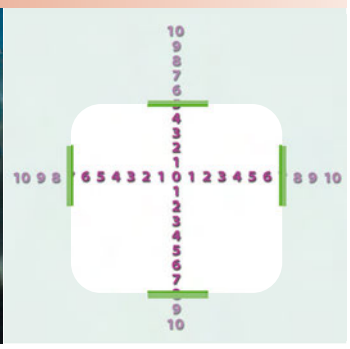
Aqua Lung Linea

£56



This single-lens mask is part of Aqua Lung's women's range. The tempered lens, skirt and sleek frame are moulded as one, so the lens can be positioned very close to the eyes, resulting in excellent field of vision as well as very low volume. The mask has a large, soft silicon skirt with bands of differing textures for a better seal. Buckles are Aqua Lung's full-swivel Cardanic Joint versions fitted to the frame for fine adjustments. Guards are built in to prevent hair tangles. The four-colour Linea comes with clear or black skirts.





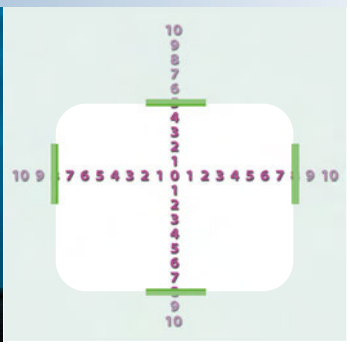
Mares X-Vision LiquidSkin

£57



Inventively shaped twin tempered lenses are set into a frame attached to a LiquidSkin skirt, with two grades of silicon moulded together for firmness and soft elasticity. Small horizontal ribs add stiffness around the nose-pocket to prevent the frame collapsing onto the diver's nose. Squeeze-to-adjust buckles are attached directly to the skirt, and the strap has a large bi-silicon head-pad. The mask is available with twin coloured silicon skirts in black, white or clear with a total of eight optional colour combinations.





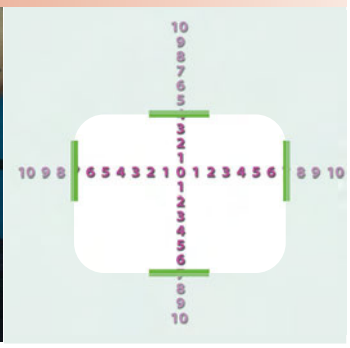
Scubapro Synergy 2

£57



Just released, this framed single-lens mask has a unique skirt design. Though it's based on Scubapro's Trufit technology, a secondary silicon outer skin sits over the thinner inner skirt to add support. Both outer skin and inner skirt have moulded ribs throughout to add rigidity. The single Ultra Clear glass lens sits in a slightly raked frame. Buckles attach to the inner skirt, with twin pinch-buttons to adjust the strap, which has an anatomical head-piece at the rear. This mask has clear or black skirts and four colour options.





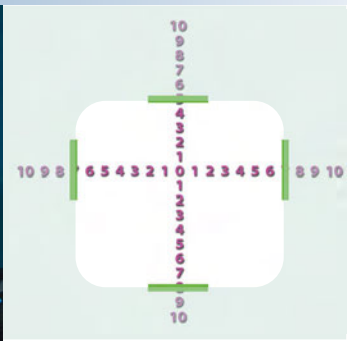
Scubapro Synergy Twin

£57



This two-lens framed mask also uses TruFit skirt technology. The inverted-teardrop Ultra Clear optical glass lenses have a slight rake towards the base. The skirt is made from extremely soft silicon that's thicker and firmer near the mask frame for support and rigidity, while the edge is thinner, giving a softer feel and a better seal, and has a ribbing pattern to stop it collapsing under pressure. The strap-buckles are attached to the skirt. Choose from black or clear skirts with five colour combos plus optional tinted, anti-reflective lenses.





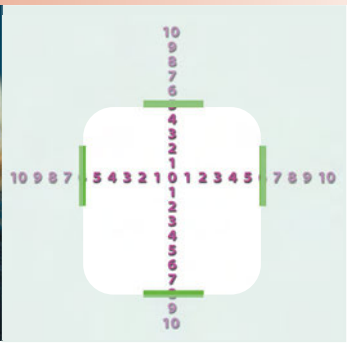
IST Gauge

£60



This four-lens framed design is for divers who need optical assistance to read or focus at close distances. The tempered lenses are clear at the top with +1.75 dioptre magnifying lenses set at a 50° angle at the bottom to facilitate reading of gauges, compasses, computers and camera screens. The skirt is moulded from liquid silicon and has the strap-buckles attached. The Gauge comes with a clear skirt and two colour frame options or a black skirt with a black frame. Not surprisingly, this is a very popular mask.





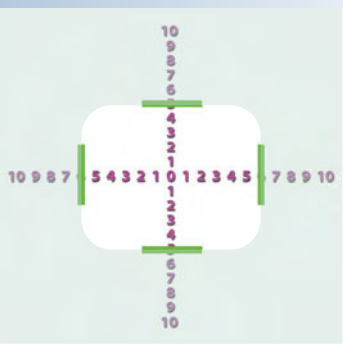
TUSA Ceos

£61.50



This twin-lens framed mask from Tabata USA (TUSA) employs the same technology as on its single-lens sibling, the Freedom Elite. The skirt employs round-edged, varied-thickness soft silicon with dimples and ridges to enhance comfort and fit. The Ceos comes with a black skirt and seven frame colour options or clear skirt with nine frame colours. The test mask had tempered glass but a Pro version has CrystalView lenses with an anti-reflective coating to block out 100% of UV light. Prescriptive lenses are available.





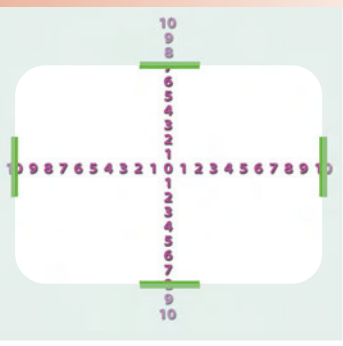
Hollis M1

£64



The M1 is a single-lens frameless mask with a rounded design. The soft silicon skirt is moulded in one piece around the lens with a matt exterior finish and a gloss interior, and a larger nose-pocket than other masks here would suit those with bigger noses. The lens is raked towards the cheeks to enhance downward vision, which, with the wide lens profile, gives a great all-round field of view. The lens uses optical-quality St Gobain glass. Strap-buckles are attached directly to the skirt. The MI comes in all-black only.





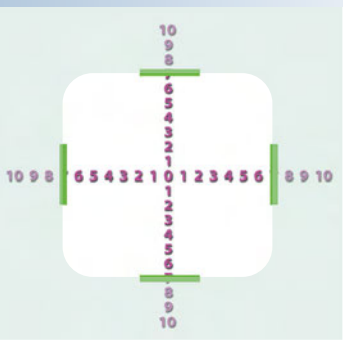
TUSA Freedom Elite

£64



This single-lens framed mask with tempered glass has the Freedom style of round-edged skirt with dimpled surface and varying silicon thickness with stability ridges. The buckle is fitted to the frame and swivels in and out as well as up and down. The silicon strap has a 3D split that fits snugly to the contours of the head. The mask is available with a black skirt and three colour frame options, or a clear skirt with a further six colour options.





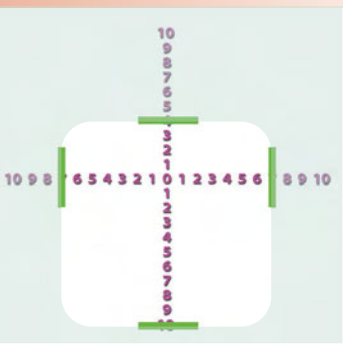
Cressi Big Eyes Evolution Crystal

£65



This twin-lens framed design has inverted teardrop-shaped tempered lenses. Cressi was one of the first makers to realise the value of a raked angle to enhance FOV, and has patented the optimal angle used in its masks. The crystal silicon for the skirt was developed for Cressi and is very soft, transparent and treated to prevent discolouration. The silver strap is made from a different grade of silicon, and the buckles are fitted to the frame. The Crystal version has five colour options and will accept prescriptive lenses.





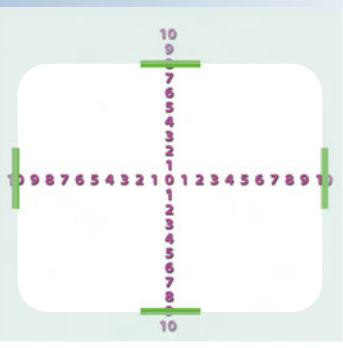
Atomic Aquatics Frameless 2

£80



This unisex mask has no frame, and the large single lens is moulded into the silicon skirt. The skirt is made of two grades of silicon, the main body using a stiffer grade, and the area around the seal uses a very soft pliable grade to ensure a good seal. The lens is made from Ultra Clear glass and is held close to the eyes, giving a very wide FOV. A slight rake towards the bottom of the mask enhances the view of chest and waist areas. The strap is a soft silicon split-pad design. Available in either all-clear or all-black in three sizes.





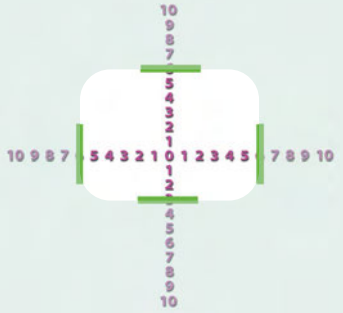
AquaViz UTS Pro Core

£55 + Inzerts from £45



The UTS is part of the range of Core masks suitable for use with Sportviz Inzerts. The mask is a framed model with a tempered single lens. Its large profile allows for fitting an Inzert ophthalmic frame with prescription lenses and the mounting rail. Inzerts come in four standard bifocal dioptres as stock items, and custom Inzert lenses are also available. The positioning of the Inzert in the mask is fixed but puts it at the same distance from your eyes as a normal pair of spectacles. Tight FOV. The mask comes in all-black only.





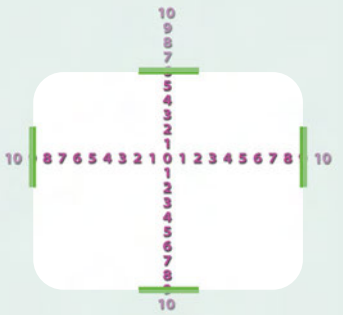
Atomic Aquatics SubFrame ARC

£110



The SubFrame is a framed twin-lens mask with a twist – it has an internal main frame that's bonded directly to the silicon skirt with a secondary lens retainer locked in place with a stainless steel bridge. This results in a low-volume profile but enables the lenses to be removed and replaced with prescriptive versions. Fitted as standard with Ultra Clear glass lenses, the model on test had the optional anti-reflection coating (ARC). The SubFrame comes with clear or black skirts with 12 colour options and combinations.







CONTACT:

Aqua Lung, www.aqualung.com/uk
AquaViz, www.sportviz.co.uk
Atomic, www.atomicaquatics.com
Cressi, www.cressi.co.uk
Hollis, www.hollisuk.com
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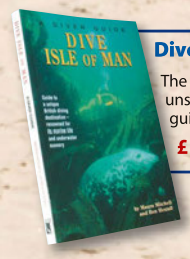
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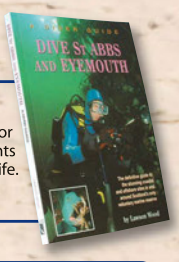
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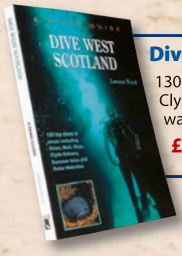
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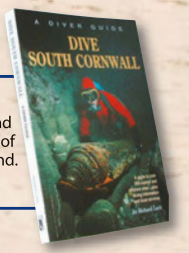
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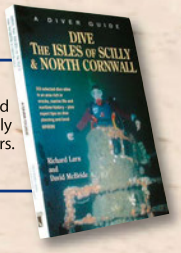
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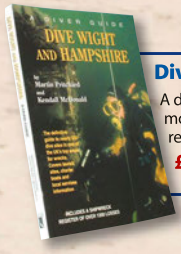
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Thursday, 7 May marks the centenary of the sinking of Cunard liner RMS *Lusitania* off south-western Ireland following a torpedo strike. Arguably second only to the *Titanic* as the world's most famous shipwreck, *Lusitania* was first dived in 1935 and, at 93m deep, has been drawing underwater explorers ever since. SAM WARWICK reports, photos EOIN McGARRY, illustrations STUART WILLIAMSON

100 YEARS SUBMERGED

THE 31,550-TON *LUSITANIA* was built by John Brown & Co Ltd of Glasgow, launched on 7 June, 1906, and commenced her maiden voyage on 7 September the following year.

Steam-turbine engines powering quadruple screws gave the vessel a service speed of 25 knots. At the time she entered service the *Lusitania* was Cunard's largest and most elegant vessel to date.

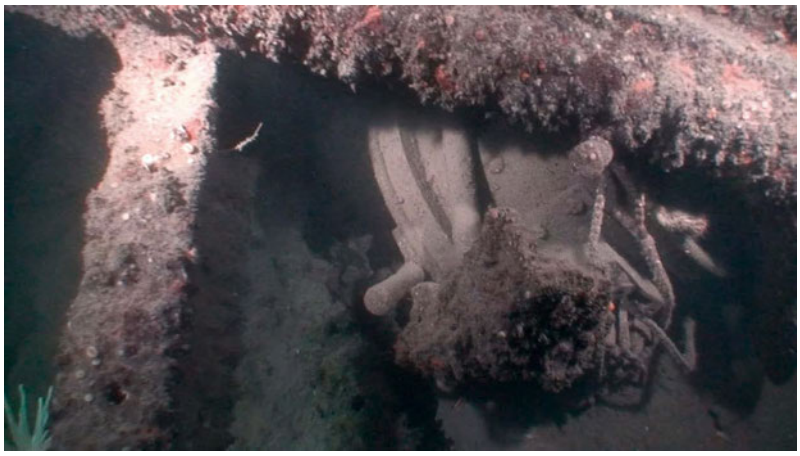
She was soon joined by a sister-ship, *Mauretania*, in November 1907, and over the next few years both vessels gained the Blue Riband for the fastest Atlantic crossing, and dominated the transatlantic passenger service.

At the onset of World War One *Lusitania* remained in commercial service on the Atlantic route, but her distinctive red funnels were later painted black.

On 1 May, 1915, the ship sailed from New York as normal, despite warnings that the German Navy was targeting all Allied shipping. On 7 May the U-boat *U20*, commanded by Walther Schwieger fired a torpedo that struck *Lusitania*.

A second explosion was initially thought to have resulted from a second strike, although later the *U20* commander's log revealed that only one torpedo had been fired.

The *Lusitania* immediately started to list to starboard and sank in just 18 minutes with the loss of at least 1198 lives, including more than 100 Americans.



Left: Bridge telegraph on the *Lusitania*.



There were sufficient lifeboats, but the liner's heavy list prevented many of them from being launched.

The cause of the second explosion has never been satisfactorily explained, but the German government insisted that it was proof that the *Lusitania* was carrying illegal munitions, a claim vigorously denied by Britain. The sinking was publicly condemned on both sides of the Atlantic, and became a contributory factor in the USA joining the war.

Although resting in 93m, the wreck of such a grand ocean liner was always going to be a serious target for underwater exploration and salvage. There was the added mystery of the second explosion and questions over the cargo manifest to be resolved.

On 26 October, 1935, the British diver Jim Jarratt became the first person to dive on the *Lusitania*.

Jarratt used leading-edge diving technology of the time in the form of the Peress dive suit, named after its inventor Joseph Salim Peress. This metal suit fully enclosed the diver at normal atmospheric pressure and was capable of reaching depths of up to 400m.

The diver was lowered to the wreck, where articulated joints in the arms and legs gave him limited movement. Steel claws replaced hands, and the suit also included a telephone communications link between the diver and the surface.

Jarratt alighted at the top of the wreck at 73m and was able to measure the size of the rivets, assisting in positive identification of the wreck as that of *Lusitania*.

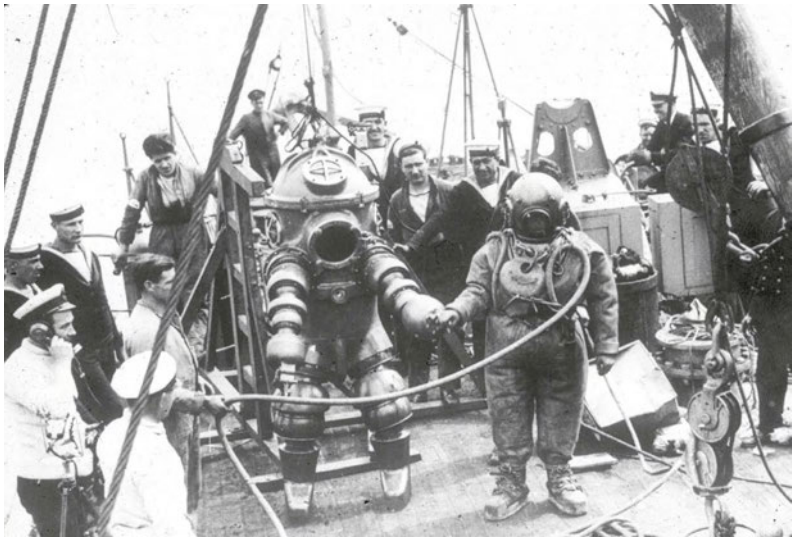
The Royal Navy is known to have carried out some operations on the wreck site during the late 1940s and early '50s. Although its activities were classified it would appear that the wreck was subjected to a series of depth-charges, supposedly for practice and testing. In 1953 a team of hardhat divers undertook a number of dives to the wreck.

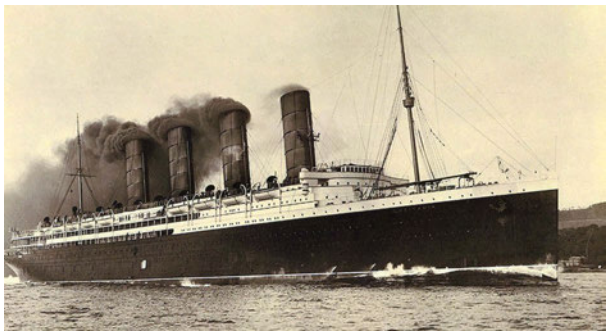
THE FIRST SCUBA-DIVE on the *Lusitania* was carried out by an American, John Light, on 20 July, 1960. Light used conventional equipment – a wetsuit, fins, cylinders and a double-hose regulator.

Over the course of three diving seasons he completed 42 dives on the wreck, with a typical bottom time of 10 minutes. He breathed standard air, which not only has severe narcotic effects at such depth but is also highly hypoxic. It is a dive that would be unthinkable in modern times.

During September and October 1982 Oceaneering International carried out the first full-scale commercial salvage operation on the *Lusitania*. Divers operated in saturation from the salvage vessel *Archimedes,* and typically worked the wreck for eight hours at a time.

Oceaneering was indiscriminate in doing whatever was required to find and raise anything of value, so a lot of





explosives and underwater cutting tools were used to open up parts of the wreck such as the specie room, where valuable consignments would be secured.

Some of the larger items raised included two anchors and three of the four bronze propellers, which weighed in at 16 tons each.

Thousands of smaller items were raised, including brass portholes, Cunard china, silver cutlery, glassware, all manner of brass fixtures and fittings, watches, souvenir "Kitchener" spoons, rare chronometers and the ship's steam-whistle. Sadly a lot of the items were not conserved properly, and their condition deteriorated rapidly once raised.

In 1993 National Geographic commissioned a TV documentary about the *Lusitania*. A key element was to be a two-week exploration employing the latest film and lighting technology.

Unlike previous visits to the wreck this one involved not divers but a mini-submarine called *Jason*, complemented by two unmanned ROVs, *Media* and *Homer*. Operations took place from the support vessel *Northern Horizon*.

Dr Robert Ballard, famous for his part in the discovery of the wreck of *Titanic*, led the expedition. The team concluded that the second mystery explosion was caused by exploding coal dust in the empty bunkers, a theory that is not widely accepted.

THE 1990s HERALDED a new age in recreational diving with the increased use of breathing gas mixtures other than regular compressed air for deep diving – technical diving was born.

In June 1994 the Starfish Enterprise technical dive team led by Polly Tapson assembled in Kinsale, Ireland. It consisted of eight British and four American divers, including John Chatterton and Gary Gentile.

Over a two-week period the team completed 120 dives on the *Lusitania*. The divers managed bottom times of 20-28 minutes and typically spent around 90 minutes decompressing.

Typical equipment consisted of back-mounted twin 15-litre cylinders of trimix, side-slung tanks of nitrox and decompression gas of pure oxygen.

A trimix blend of 13/52 gave the diver an equivalent narcotic depth of 37m at a depth of 90m. Some divers also used a fourth gas, argon, for drysuit inflation, chosen for its insulation properties.

On a second Starfish expedition Polly Tapson reported the sight of long metal tubes on the wreck. This sparked considerable international interest, as *Lusitania* was known to be carrying famous works of art owned by Sir Hugh Lane, stored in sealed lead tubes.

Subsequently on 25 January, 1995, the Irish government issued an Underwater Heritage Order to protect the *Lusitania* under the National Monuments Act.

In May 1996, after decades of court cases in America, England and Ireland, the American Gregg Bemis, a former business partner of John Light in the ☛







Opposite page: Eoin McGarry with *Lusitania*'s telemotor, recovered in 2011.

Above left: Jim Jarratt of the Tritonia dive-team prepares to dive the wreck in 1935.

Above: *Lusitania* in her heyday.

Left, from top: Underwater remains – chime whistle; first-class window with filigree ornamentation; a depth charge.



BY A STRANGE TWIST OF FATE THE TIME OF SLACK WATER IS 2.15PM

LUSITANIA TODAY

MOST DIVERS FORTUNATE enough to have dived the wreck of the *Lusitania* rate it as one of the highlights of their diving experience, and affectionately refer to it as the *Lucy*.

The wreck lies with the bow pointing to the north-east and stern to south-west, resting on the starboard side at an angle of roughly 30°.

The most intact part is the bow, where the name "LUSITANIA" is still visible on the port side.

The starboard anchor is still firmly in place. Most of the bridge structure has slid down the starboard side of the wreck into the debris field scattered on the seabed.

Portholes and windows of all shapes and sizes line the length of the wreck, many of which still contain their glass. There are numerous holes and openings along the starboard side of the hull, some original, others due to salvage work.

A few of the ship's railings still stand proud. Occasionally tiled areas are exposed, including the mosaic tiling in areas once well-trodden by the first-class passengers.

Two blades from the one remaining propeller are visible poking out from underneath the wreck.

Scattered all over the wreck are numerous small artefacts, such as light-fittings, Cunard china and the occasional personal effect.

Above: Stuart Williamson's illustration of the bow of the wreck.

Below: Plaque mounted on a *Lusitania* porthole to commemorate the centenary of the liner's sinking, dedicated to 'those 1201 souls'.

late 1960s, was officially recognised as legal owner of the wreck.

He eventually dived the wreck himself for the first time in 2004, at the age of 76.

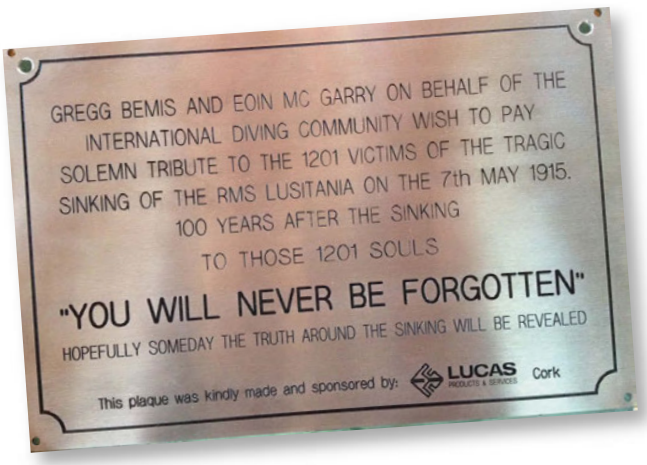
Diving expeditions in 2006 and 2008 identified an abundance of .303 rifle ammunition scattered on the wreck.

Although this caused a stir in the press it was not of major historic significance because *Lusitania* was already known to be carrying 4200 cases of rifle ammunition.

However, reports from the divers did seem to suggest that the large quantity and variety of ordnance on the wreck was more than they had expected.

In 2009 Discovery Channel sponsored an expedition to the wreck with Odyssey Marine International that resulted in the documentary *Lusitania Revealed*. No manned submersibles or divers were used, only ROVs.

An extensive expedition sponsored by National Geographic took place in August 2011, with technical divers, commercial divers using Nuytco atmosphere suits, manned submersibles and ROVs.



WHAT BECAME OF U20?

THE LUSITANIA WAS the tenth of 37 vessels to be sunk by *U20*. The U-boat met its end when it ran aground off Denmark on 4 November, 1916.

The crew abandoned the submarine and detonated the torpedoes in the tubes to prevent it from falling into enemy hands. The Danish authorities later sold the wreck for salvage, and explosives were used to disperse the remains.

Very little of the wreck remains today, but what does lies in shallow water, a short distance from land. Some artefacts are on display at the Stranding Museum in Thorsminde.

The team were licensed to penetrate the wreck and recover artefacts. Items raised included the bronze telemotor, telegraph and one of the ornate first-class cabin windows.

The recoveries were made by an Irish technical dive team lead by Eoin McGarry and overseen by an archaeologist and preservation specialist.

McGarry describes modern-day diving on the wreck: "There are many logistics to diving the *Lusitania* – a state-approved licence, the owner's permission, weather, tides, suitable dive vessel, the placement of the shot on such a large vessel and, most importantly, an experienced dive team," he says.

"Dives are normally conducted using closed-circuit rebreathers. All divers have to be Mod 3 certified and experienced in the use of mixed gases and not be deterred by the often-low visibility and hazardous conditions that are normal while diving the *Lusitania*.

"Bottom times are normally 20-30 minutes, with total run times running from two to three hours, depending on the bottom time.

"All dives are executed during slack tide, bar on neap tides where the run is small and dives can proceed safely.

"A decompression station is used for all dives and is released from the downline by the last diver up, so as to allow the station to drift with the current, making for a safer and more comfortable hang-time for the divers."

If all goes to plan, a commemorative dive will take place on 7 May this year to mark the 100th anniversary of the tragic sinking. A special plaque will be placed on the wreck, along with a capsule containing the names of all those who lost their lives in the disaster.

BY A STRANGE TWIST of fate the time of slack water is 2.15pm – the exact time the *Lusitania* was sunk 100 years ago.

A number of other special events are taking place to mark the centenary. The Cunard cruise liner *Queen Victoria* is making a special voyage, sailing from Southampton on 3 May and calling at Cork on 7 May. Liverpool Maritime Museum is running a special *Lusitania* exhibition, and many artefacts from the wreck will be on display.

Despite all the latest technology, the quest to get a definitive answer (and proof) of the cause of the second explosion remains as elusive as ever.

But with each passing year the wreck of the *Lusitania* continues to deteriorate, along with the opportunities to reveal her true story.





CHUNDER WONDER

SOMEWHERE ON THE ROAD BETWEEN MIAMI and Key Largo, they start handing out drugs to the divers.

"Just in case – you know it can be a bit choppy out there," advises the dive-guide from the front seat of the minibus. People are passing round and scoffing the tablets as if they're Smarties. Everybody takes them unquestioningly. Everybody except me.

"No thanks, I'm from England." I offer this fact by way of an acceptable universal explanation for oddball behaviour. Here in the USA, it's never failed. There seems to be a ferocious appetite for medicating every aspect of life, with a pill for everything from broken hearts to broken fingernails.

I turn to check on one of my fellow-passengers, the "Special Forces" guy. Moments earlier he was chatting happily about his many daring adventures around the world on land and sea, and now he's reaching for the tablets.

"You don't need to take that." I tell him. "You know you're going to be totally fine."

"Yeah," he chuckles, "but someone is going to be throwing up on the boat and I don't want to be that guy." *That* guy. Heaven forbid.

Apparently it's OK to risk your life in some random military adventure but it's not OK to risk throwing up in front of a group of total strangers.

Perhaps this is where my Britishness kicks in. In many UK towns and cities, throwing up your guts in front of a group of strangers is just part of a good night out.

UNDER PAIN OF DEATH, DO NOT THROW UP INTO THE CAMERA-BUCKET

My other bit of Britishness – politeness – forbids me from pointing out that those tablets take several hours to become effective, and we'll be on the boat in a half-hour or so.

Actually, I suspect that it won't make an ounce of difference either way. If you give someone a pill and assure them that it prevents seasickness, it usually will.

However, an anxious diver who is convinced that he or she is going to feel nauseous will be turning green before even stepping onto the boat.

I don't even consider the possibility of being seasick. But if you must insist on it, here are some handy protocols:

- Do lean over the side of the boat to hurl. Downwind is preferable.
- Do wipe your face afterwards and before attempting to speak to anyone. It's not pretty and it's not clever.
- Don't chunder into the mask-bucket. That won't win you any friends.
- Under pain of death, do not throw up into the camera-bucket. Photographers are tetchy beasts who will not see the funny side. Most would prefer that you threw up into their lap than over their camera kit. And that way you can guarantee that the rest of the group will definitely see the funny side.
- Do not lock yourself into the toilet and throw up everywhere. The skipper will "red-card" you from the boat, and your buddies are likely to impose a lengthy ban for bringing scuba-diving into disrepute.
- Please refrain from making a noise like a cow with a collapsed lung or declaring loudly that you're dying. Unless you are either Italian, or in Italy, or both – in which case such behaviour is, in fact, compulsory.
- Finally, bear in mind that repeated retching is actually quite exhausting. You'll feel knocked down. But you'll get up again.

LOUISE TREWAVAS

RAINFOREST JEWEL





DAVID JONES goes diveabout on the southern Caribbean island of Tobago, spending a week working his way round the coast in an anti-clockwise direction and sampling some of the highlights

THE TWIN-ISLAND REPUBLIC of Trinidad & Tobago is as far south as you can get in the Caribbean. It lies just off the coast of Venezuela, closer to South America than any of its Caribbean neighbours.

Although the two islands are linked politically, economically and geographically, they could hardly be more different. Trinidad is an industrial and commercial hub, sustained predominantly by the oil and gas industry, with a multi-ethnic population of 1.3 million.

The smaller Tobago, some 50 miles north-east, is a laid-back, rainforest-covered, volcanic island, with a population of only 170,000.

Under water, there is a similar contrast. Trinidad suffers from low salinity and excessive silting because of its proximity to the Orinoco river. Coral cannot grow in such conditions, and diving is limited to the northern tip.

Tobago, on the other hand, is fed by the nutrient-rich Guyana current from the south, which supports considerable underwater diversity.

This tiny island promised a lot both above and below the water, and I had just a week to explore it.

Flying into Tobago can be relatively painless – or it can be a little more complicated. At the time of writing Monarch had a direct flight twice a week. Other airlines such as BA and Virgin have more regular schedules that involve stops in Trinidad and in some cases other Caribbean islands.

I flew in via Trinidad and the transfer and short hop were not too onerous. Landing in Tobago as the sun was setting, we looked down on the hotels, green golf courses and long white sandy beaches that dominate the southern half of the island.

In the distance I could see the sharp pinnacles of the jungle-covered main ridge in the north-east that forms the island's spine. Pigeon Peak, the

Pictured: Looking into Batteaux Bay – one of many beautiful hidden coves on Speyside.











point, is only 550m above sea level but it's still impressive.

The journey from the airport to Speyside, my first destination on this whistlestop tour, was fascinating. We drove along the eastern coast from the capital Scarborough, the darkness punctuated every few miles by tiny villages and the aromas from roadside restaurants and bars.

It's a small island but the winding "Windward Road" meant that the journey took about 90 minutes.

Suddenly we were there at a pretty hotel, waves lapping up on the beach and the sounds of the jungle in the background. Get me into the water!

In the morning I noted the view – a large bay, a couple of smaller islands offshore, a few little hotels, and some beachside restaurants.

We drove the short distance to the jetty, jumped onto the dive-boat and motored out towards Goat Island.

THE DIVE BRIEF ON THE WAY wasn't exactly vague but it was non-committal. Big sponges, gorgonians, pelagics and plenty of action were guaranteed, but there was also that element of what we "might" see. I know marine animals don't read the script, but the emphasis was definitely on uncertainty. Exciting!

We cruised past Goat Island, dominated by the beautifully located but rather dilapidated house once owned by Bond writer Ian Fleming, and on towards the southern end of Little Tobago Island. I was aware that Tobago is known for strong currents, but I love drift-diving.

Our host Sean Robinson, who has been running diving operations in Tobago for longer than most, advised: "If you feel the current, put up your safety sausage or you'll end up in Africa."

On that encouraging note, we did a quick pre-dive safety check and fell backwards into the water.

Sean's sense of direction might have been slightly awry, but his sentiment wasn't misplaced. We were immediately whisked away on a ride worthy of any theme park, but one on which the scenery was far more impressive. The water was strangely green (it changed the next day), but the marine life was spectacular.

The site was called Black Jack Hole, so I was not surprised to see significant numbers of that species in residence. As the undulating ridges sped past, I was struck by the density of marine life.

Crayfish and morays peered from every crevice. Barrel sponges of breath-taking size and quantity drew near and receded.

I counted at least four species of angelfish (there are six in Tobago) as well as nurse sharks, rays and a plethora of other species.



Above from left: Drift-diving along the coral reef – a Speyside special; spiny lobsters abound, especially at night, and Japanese Garden is a great place to see them; a large octopus displays a white colour – a sign of fear, so it's time to give it space.

Below: Descending into the gap under London Bridge.

Over the next couple of days Speyside grew better and better. Green turtles were commonplace, but we also saw a leatherback on two occasions.

At the top of the island, the nutrient-rich Guyana current mixes with the North Atlantic Equatorial to create ideal conditions for mantas, and the rays are frequent visitors to the area.

Bookends, a few miles south, consists of two pinnacles. Diving between them provides a grand entrance to a dive that ends in a natural amphitheatre – a fish-bowl – where many species seem to congregate. Grand Canyon, Cathedral and Batteaux Bay are all Speyside sites worthy of mention, but deserving special recognition is Japanese Gardens.

I was fortunate to dive this twice. During the day it was good, but at night it was incredible.

The dive starts off as a gentle drift among beautiful coral formations. Huge morays swim freely at night, hunting among the rocks, accompanied by octopus, squid and other night predators.

Spiny and slipper lobsters give themselves away, their eyes reflecting in the torchlight. At the end of the dive you lose the shelter provided by the island and the current picks up again.

This is a good time to end the night dive, but during the day you can just carry on and continue into Kamikaze Cut, another adventure for thrill-seekers.

SPEYSIDE DOES HAVE SOME less hair-raising dive-sites. On shallower dives there is an abundant macro "stew" that is a delight. At the Aquarium, closer to the beach, yellow-headed jawfish can be found in great numbers, dancing around their holes in the sand with impunity.

Other species well worth looking out for are the flameback angelfish and the giraffe garden eel, which is indigenous to Tobago and Brazil.

After a couple of days it was time to move on. We travelled anti-clockwise







around the island, heading towards the Caribbean side. At the northern tip are the London Bridge and St Giles Island dive-sites.

The former is a natural arch, hence the name, which creates a narrow passageway through the rock down to the seabed 30m below. It's a great dive, but conditions need to be right.

THE SAME IS TRUE OF THE other sites on this northern coast. St Giles bears the full brunt of the Atlantic surge (we could feel it at 20m down at London Bridge) and diving it is not always possible.

Moving further round we arrived at Charlotteville, a quiet fishing village with sandy beaches and a population of a few hundred people. This area has to be on the to-do list for divers in Tobago, mainly because of the Sisters, a group of five pinnacles that protrude from the surface a few miles south of the village.

Pretty unspectacular on the surface, beneath it the pinnacles present a series of peaks and canyons rich in marine life.

For some reason the site is also said to be habitually visited by scalloped and great hammerheads. There are still plenty of amazing sponges there, but the ecosystem is slightly different, with an increase in soft and whip corals and a change in the density of some fish species.

As we headed south down the western coastline, the diving changed again. The increase in human settlement inevitably impacts on the marine environment. There were fewer fish and sponges and more silt, but still some very good diving.

Just south of Plymouth is one of Tobago's two wreck-sites, the mv *Maverick*. Lying in 33m this was an 85m car ferry deliberately sunk in 1997 in an area that would otherwise be a pretty barren stretch of coastline.

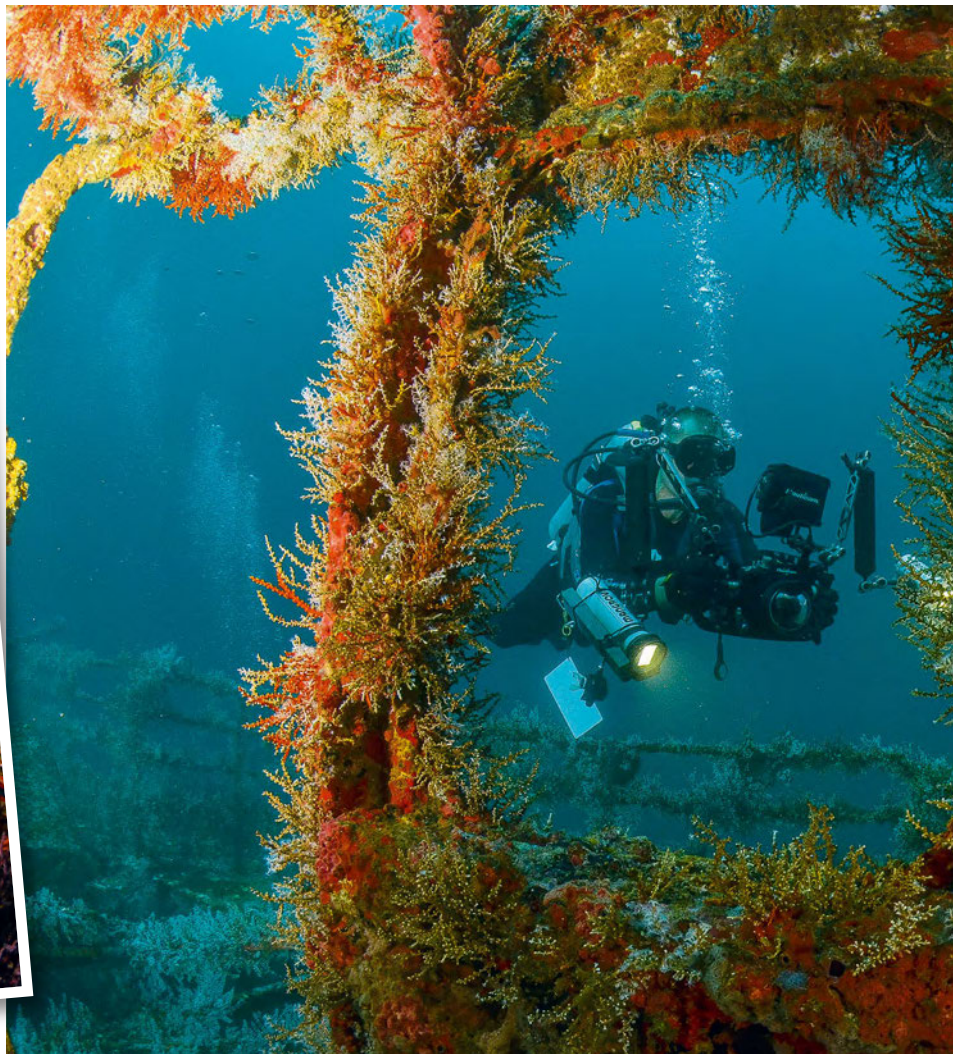
I wasn't expecting much, but did I get a surprise! Growth on the wreck is substantial, particularly of soft corals, their brilliant white feeding polyps coating it like a blanket of snow.

Hard corals are also starting to compete for space and fish have populated much of the *Maverick*. Pairs of French angelfish cruise the sides while the

Below left: A pair of French angelfish on the bow of the *Maverick*.

Below: Diver on the wreck.











stern area of the car deck is frequented by large, shark-like cobia as they hunt the shoals of silversides that hide there.

This is a brilliant wreck dive, especially for the underwater photographer.

Some of the reefs further inshore and towards the south-western corner of the island were less impressive when compared with the drift-diving in the north – more like standard Caribbean diving. Visibility was reduced as well, a reflection of the proximity to Trinidad.

THE REEFS STILL HAD a lot of life, however, and the potential to find critters made macro photography a possibility. Keep your eyes peeled for short-nosed batfish on dives around Mount Irvine.

Above from left: A large green moray eel in Speyside; yellow-headed Jawfish – be patient and they will come out for you; huge sponge formations are found everywhere, particularly on the north coast; golden coral banded shrimps are found in barrel sponges; queen angelfish, named for the 'crown' ring pattern on its head.

As you round the southern tip of the island, things start to change again. Divers' Thirst in particular is worth a visit, with the potential to see eagle rays and blacktip sharks and thousands of barrel sponges. The increase in pelagics and sponges coincides with the return of the currents.

The southern tip is also the location of the remains of the ss *Kioto*, a British merchantman sunk in 1942 by the U-boat *U514*, as well as Cove Ledge, where once again the prevailing current sets the scene and everything changes.

Tobago is all about change and contrast. You don't get the regular serving of coral reefs dive after dive that you do in some Caribbean islands; in fact you rarely know what you're going to get.

The island is diverse above and below the surface, with a vibrant culture and wonderful history. Exciting and unpredictable, it challenges expectations of divers who think they know it all.





FACTFILE

GETTING THERE ▸▸ Monarch Airlines flies direct to Tobago twice weekly, and BA and Virgin fly there indirectly.

DIVING & ACCOMMODATION ▸▸ On Speyside David Jones stayed at Manta Lodge, diving with Tobago Dive Experience. Charlotteville offers mainly cottages and apartments and Shark Shacks offers accommodation and dive packages. In the south towards Crown Point he dived with Underwater Tobago, and on the Atlantic side of the southern tip he stayed at the Magdelena Grand and dived with Tobago Dive Experience.

WEATHER ▸▸ Tobago is theoretically outside of the hurricane belt, so year-round.

CURRENCY ▸▸ Trinidad & Tobago dollars (TTD).

PRICES ▸▸ Oonasdivers offers seven nights at Blue Waters Inn on Speyside for £1365pp or at the Toucan Inn at Pigeon Point on the other side of the island for £1010, including flights, transfers, B&B accommodation (two sharing) and five days' diving. A split tour would cost around £1190 pp, www.oonasdivers.com

VISITOR INFORMATION ▸▸ www.gotrinidadandtobago.com

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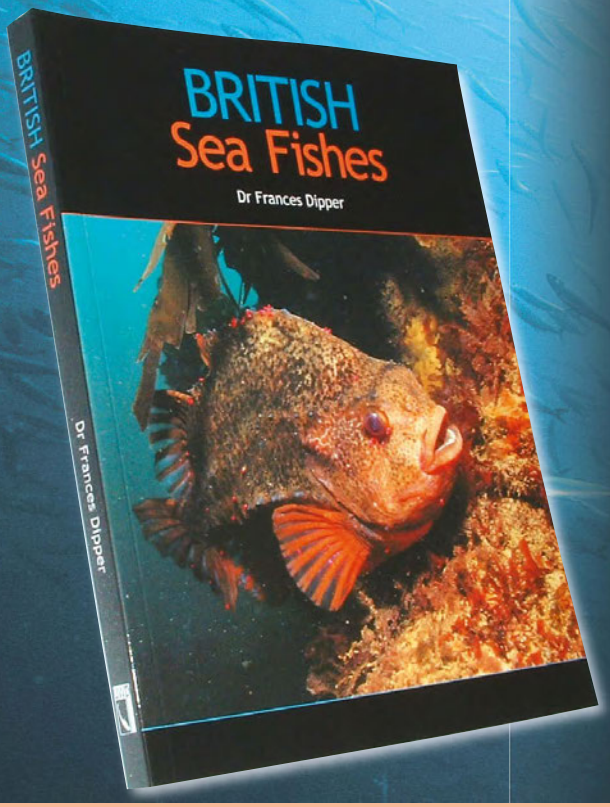
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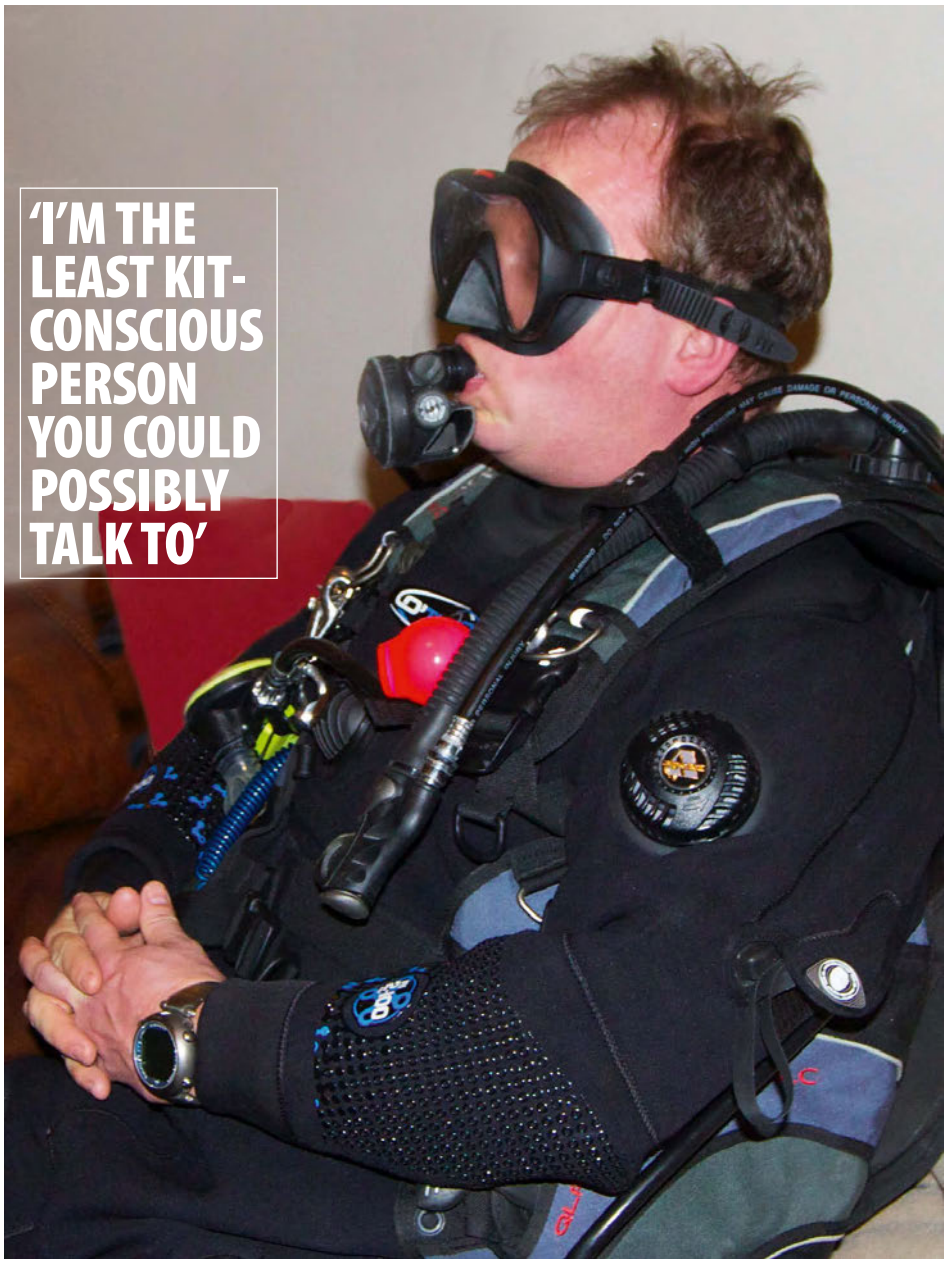
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MY FAVOURITE KIT

JAMES BRICKELL is a leading TV wildlife film-maker at the BBC Natural History Unit, where he heads the dive team. He has won two BAFTAs, for *Life In Cold Blood*, the series made with Sir David Attenborough, and the children's favourite *Deadly 60*. In 2012 he was Series Producer of *Great Barrier Reef* and recently for BBC1's *The Great British Year*



'I'M THE LEAST KIT-CONSCIOUS PERSON YOU COULD POSSIBLY TALK TO'

'I'M THE LEAST KIT-CONSCIOUS person you could possibly talk to," says James Brickell although, like most divers, once he gets talking about his equipment we find that there's a fair amount to discuss.

Brickell rarely dives purely for fun now, and unlike other subjects of this column the weight of his personal dive gear is not a major issue when travelling abroad, as it constitutes a fraction of the entire weight of a film-crew's equipment.

Having said that "we tend to take the important bits and then buy stuff at the destination. We use a lot of rental gear because with a lot of us diving it's better to rent it all than pay excess baggage."

MASKS

My mask is a Hollis. It's all black at the sides and that's good for photography. I've also got a really old mask that has side-windows – I don't know the make. If I'm filming I wear the Hollis mask because I can see what I'm doing, but if I'm directing and not having to film I wear the one with the side-panels, because I have better peripheral vision and can keep my eye on the presenters and support-divers, see what's going on.

We also use full-face masks so that we can speak under water. In the UK we use Guardians, AGAs, OTSs – there's quite a few.

I like the Kirby Morgan M-48 with the removable mouthpiece – that's what I used on *Great Barrier Reef*. I'm mostly minimal use, listening and throwing the occasional comment in.

Abroad we use a Diveways mask. It's not kitemarked in the UK because it's not oro-nasal, but I think it's got amazing sound and you can actually see the diver's face.

FINS

I use Ocean split-fins. A lot of my job is spent semi-upright in the water watching or filming, and they're good because I only need to make tiny movements to adjust my position.

I don't have to be anywhere in a hurry and they're fantastic for fine control. And they're indestructible, I've had them for ages.

I learnt with Mares Plana Avanti Quattros – great if I needed to get anywhere in a hurry, but mostly when filming if you're chasing stuff you're usually too late. The split-fins are better for fine-tuning.

DRYSUIT

I use an Ri2-100, which is O'Three's ultra-posh crushed neoprene drysuit. It's probably the best single bit of kit I've got.

Sitting still in cold water can be uncomfortable and it is expensive but it's amazing, and for what I do it couldn't be better.

We don't go to one supplier as it's against BBC practice but a few of the presenters use O'Three drysuits, so they are clearly great bits of kit. Mine is fitted to me and I'm a funny shape, short and stocky.

If I buy an off-the-peg drysuit either the arms are too long or the shoulders are too small, so O'Three fiddles with it for me and that's made a huge difference to my diving.

UNDERSUIT

Fourth Element Arctic thermals are brilliant in combination with the O'Three. If they were knackered I'd try O'Three ones, but they keep going.

WETSUIT

Embarrassing, it's an O'Neill surfing wetsuit and it's 13 to 15 years old. It was black but it's now bleached to pale grey. But to be honest if it's cold I wear a drysuit, and if it's warm, it doesn't matter.

I've got an O'Three semi, which is fantastic as well, but usually it's just shorts and T-shirt for me.

BC

My BC is an Oceanic Probe and it's brilliant because it has a lot of D-rings. As a director I end up carrying a lot of things, secondary lights, secondary camera and stuff, and that's why I use it.

I like the quick-release weight-pouches too, it's a good bit of kit. I've had it about five years, since making *Great Barrier Reef,* and it's been to hell and back. It gets a lot of hours in the water and I don't need a technical kit.



COMPUTER

I use an Oceanic OC1, just because it's a nice watch/computer. I've had it a year and a half and it's a great bit of kit. The only problem is that the bracelet is awesome for day-wear but you need to wear the rubber strap for diving to fit over a suit, and changing them if you're at all clumsy you have to be careful because the pins pop off.

Oceanic has been good but it's had to replace them. I use the OC1 as a back-up as much as anything. I've got a very basic computer on my console, and if I'm rebreather diving I use proper Sherwood stuff that comes with the rebreather.

REGULATOR

I've got a Scubapro MK17. When I first learnt to dive my instructor serviced Scubapro regs and told me they don't break. This unit has never broken. It had to be upgraded from one Scubapro to another but in 20 years I've only had the two.

It's the one bit of dive-kit where it's not really about looks. I know we all love good-looking kit but that's the bit that goes in your mouth and keeps you alive. I don't even care what it breathes like, as long as it keeps working.

Of course, the second stage is huge – you could beat someone to death with it!

REBREATHER

I'm trained on a Poseidon MKVI and I've used the Hollis Explorer. I'm not a technical diver but I was interested in the Hollis because it opens up an avenue for presenters using them.

I don't think there's anything dangerous about rebreathers but there are a lot of dangers surrounding the situations you use them in and who's using them. If you're going to play around with rebreathers and dive with them infrequently you're probably going to kill yourself.

It's no accident that we talk about flying a rebreather – if you're not going to keep your hours up then do not dive a technical rebreather.

The MKVI is great because it allows you flexibility to push some of the operational depths you get with a technical rebreather, but you can fall back into idiot mode.

The Hollis is another stage – when I dived with it I had thought it won't be that easy, but it is. It's an amazing bit of kit but the jury's still out on it perhaps.

There's a load of divers who love tables and geekery, but diving shouldn't be just about them. Why shouldn't novices and people who just want to get the best out of their diving benefit?

Also, diving at your optimum mix at any depth has got to be safer, it's better for your body. I think the MKVI and Se7en are really interesting because they showed the way, but I wonder where the middle ground will go.

I reckon we'll end up with technical rebreathers you can just stick on your back and chuck in your mouth and what I loved about the Hollis was that, yeah, you can get into the settings if you want, but also you can just dive it.

Our camera operators each tend to have a favoured rebreather unit, whether it's a Revo or a Megalodon or an Inspiration, and we encourage them to use their own kit.

With presenters you can't do that unless you're working with one who keeps his hours up, like Andy Torbet or Monty Halls.

If the presenters are working in other areas they won't have time to keep their hours up, so an easier unit that's safer becomes really attractive. We're not quite there yet.

Hollis rebreathers look good, and rebreathers are not generally great-looking bits of kit. But we're really interested in speaking under water, so I think the next step for us will be a full-face mask that can be used with a rebreather.

SMB

I used one that was so bloody dangerous it nearly killed me – as I sent it up it jammed and I went skyborne with it. Luckily my buddy grabbed my legs. I knew he had me and I was hammering at it but I couldn't get it working, so I just let go. I recovered it later, but I wouldn't dive with it again.

So I just bought a new one – I can't remember who it's made by, but it's suitably chunky.

CURRENT HOOK

I use these a lot as I have to stay still in the water, and its other use is that it has two clips and a lanyard, so if the presenter has a prop or the cameraman's changing bit's of kit he can pass it to me, I can clip it on and it's not going anywhere.

I call it a current hook but it's a hook on your BC, a lanyard and a pincer-hook.

KNIVES/CUTTERS

I've got a knife but I've never used it, other than to catch my tea on one occasion.

CAMERAS

I don't do photography for fun, that would be such a busman's holiday! I wouldn't be allowed to anyway because I'm away from home enough as it is.

Also, I work with professional award-winning underwater photographers, so it would be like getting your football out in front of Alexis Sanchez and saying here, look at this!

I guess I'd be intimidated by my colleagues being so good at it. I do take reference shots but I just use whatever happens to be around.

Professionally there are lots of good cameras but we're sort of defined by who's making the housings which you can get for the Reds, originally the Epic but now the Dragon. That's the go-to model, but we also use Phantoms in custom housings.



BAG

I've got a really plush Oceanic wheelie one with lots of compartments, but I can't get everything in it so I also use an ancient Army-surplus camouflage bag to carry bits. It has holes in it and doesn't look like something that should be stolen. In fact it looks as if it should be carrying animal feed!

James Brickell was talking to Steve Weinman.

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MANTAS OF LANTA



It's not like photo wunderkind SAEED RASHID to be caught underwater without his trusty DSLR, but when he struck lucky with manta rays off Thailand he still managed to grab a snap or two

IN THE SPRING OF 2013 I bought my first underwater camera, and I haven't looked back. I've had great fun using it, but admit to slow progress and varied levels of success.

This may come as a shock to many of you but you don't have to dive every time you go away! I know it's easy for me to say, because I get to travel, dive and get paid for it. But sometimes just being away and knowing you're not going to dive every day is a nice feeling.

Saying that, I still keep my D6 on my wrist, mask packed in my case, certification cards in my wallet and, of course, a housing for whichever camera I have with me (just for messing around on the beach, you understand).

On a recent holiday I had a chance to use all these. How many times do we hear the dreaded words: "*You should have been here last week*"? Well, while staying on Koh Lanta, Thailand I had a message from Paul Lees, a good friend and creator of the *DIVE Thailand* app. Paul lives on the neighbouring island of Phuket, and his first word was "mantas".

"Get yourself to Hin Daeng and Hin Muang," he said. It seems that every trip that week had encountered large groups of mantas on these deepwater reefs.

HAVING HEARD THIS SORT of thing many times before, I wasn't in any kind of rush. Paul then explained that he had arranged for one of the dive centres on the island to pick us up the next day and take us out.

Knowing that this meant a five-hour boat trip out and a five-hour boat trip back, just to hear those famous lines "*Sorry you didn't see any, but yesterday we had 12 around the boat*", I wasn't over the moon about the early start.

Surely this would ruin my day, a day I had already planned to spend eating and drinking on the beach – which, after all, was why we were there!

After a quick chat with my partner Lou, we decided that it would be nice to go out for the day, and she had never seen a manta ray. So it would be a great experience if we should chance on any.

At 5.30am the next day we were picked up and delivered to the Lanta Diver office, where we showed our cards, filled in the usual paperwork and were fitted for our dive gear.

These days I tend to hire kit when away, and using dive-centre equipment is never a worry because the good ones tend to service it far more often than most divers do their own. The gear we were handed looked very new, anyway.

A short walk from the office was the boat, our base for the long day ahead. It was a very comfortable vessel and, as with many day-boats around the world, it was originally built as a liveaboard, then completely redesigned and rebuilt for day-diving.

This large boat, one of three in the fleet, took up to 38 divers and had a large dive-deck, adequate seating inside and plenty of room outside. As we were there at the end of the season it was about half-full, with lots of small groups gathered together with their own dive-guide.

With a ratio of four divers to one dive-master, it was almost like paying for a

Pictured: A manta draws the divers off Koh Lanta.

Above right: It was a long boat-ride there and back – but well worth the trip.



private guide. Fabian was assigned just for the two of us. He was young and enthusiastic and this was his last trip with Lanta Divers, but he was reputed to be the most successful guide with manta encounters, so we were hoping for good things.

Not long after we sailed we were served a large cooked breakfast, just what we needed to kick-start the day. Everyone soon split up from their groups and started chatting to each other, getting excited about the day ahead.

Still wary of later disappointment, I just smiled and carried on eating, knowing full well that our chances were not good at all.

We were soon being asked to get kitted up. It's funny how quickly five hours passes when you're sitting in the sun and chatting. As soon as we had tied up, one of the guides jumped in to test the current. "Mantas!" she shouted. "I just jumped on a manta!"

Everyone rushed over, and we could see large shadows moving just below the surface. It seemed I was wrong to doubt Paul – we were there at the right time.

ARMED WITH MY iPHONE and Sony compact, both in Nauticam housings, I jumped in. There below me were indeed mantas, two of them from what I could see. Lou and Fabian soon joined me, and we did out final checks and started our dive.

This first dive was on Hin Muang, which translates as Purple Rock. As with most locations at which I have seen mantas the visibility wasn't great, perhaps 10-15m, and there were a couple of other boats' worth of divers already in the water.

The extra bubbles didn't make the visibility any better as we descended. Slowly more mantas came into sight – three more with the two at the surface, then another and another.

Soon we had eight or nine rays swimming around us.

We quickly realised that it would be difficult to follow the detailed dive plan that Fabian had given us, so we made it clear to each other that we were OK to hang around next to the reef and just watch as each manta swam past.

Even though we were in the company of two other boat-loads of divers, perhaps 20 people, it really was a lovely sight. Time was soon up, and we had to ascend to our safety stop.

Back on the boat, everyone was in high spirits. Well, you would be having spent an hour with those huge rays, wouldn't you?

One thing I love about Thailand is that surface intervals are always accompanied by amazing food. No warm sandwiches here, it's lovely tasty curries all the way.

Anyone who knows me will know that this was almost as exciting as the diving, I really love my food, and Thailand is a foodie's dream.

Once again Lanta Diver came up trumps, with food as good as I have had in any Thai beach-front restaurant, but this one had the best of all views – mantas splashing about all around us.

While we were eating the boat moved the short distance over to our next site – Hin Daeng, or Red Rock. It was soon time to get back in the water.

LUCKILY, ONLY ONE other small boat had joined us, but it had already been decided that we would try to enter the water on our own and pick a time when the other boats were getting out.

In the back of your mind is always the thought that the mantas will leave and we won't get to see any on the next dive. This idea soon disappeared as we all peered over the side and saw several manta-shaped shadows just under the surface.

Perhaps it was the lack of bubbles





from the other divers, but the water seemed clearer. These mantas seemed bigger than those on the last dive – some of them could have been the same but some were notably different, with two very white and some very large dark rays splashing around at the surface.

The three of us spent our dive only a few metres down, because there was no need to go very deep – the action seemed to be happening near the surface.

This dive was even better than the last, with rays buzzing all around us, looping the loop and splashing at the surface.

It was hard to count them – we reckoned the numbers were much the same as on the previous dive – but it's not the quantity that matters, it's the experience, and this was a great one.

Soon it was time to surface and end our day's diving. Having not been very deep we didn't really need a safety stop, but any chance to spend some extra time in the water was fine by me, and as it happens hanging around at 3m beneath a DSMB was just as wonderful as the rest of the dive.

As if to say goodbye, these wonderful fish swam past one by one, waving their wings.

I've often been accused of not living in the moment, and being too wrapped up in taking photos. Well, not having my large DSLR rig I wasn't as interested in the photography that day and I had hardly snapped a shot – it was just a great experience.

The photos I took are not going to win any awards but they will remind me of an amazing unexpected dive.

Top: Divers take up a good viewing position…

Above: … and there's time for a selfie with a ray in frame.

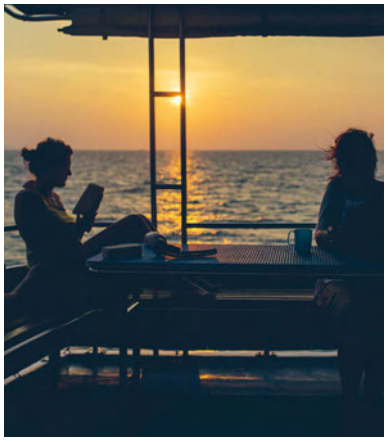
Below: An overhead display.

Below right: Returning to Phuket with that pleasant satisfied feeling.

I was impressed by the Lanta Diver set-up. We were well looked after by experienced and friendly staff who treated us to one of the best day's diving we've had on a non-diving holiday!

The moral of the story is that sometimes you're in the right place at the right time, and even if you don't expect to go diving it's always worth keeping your certification card in your wallet. You never know when you might need it.





Lanta Diver is a PADI 5 IDC Centre. A two-dive day costs 2900 baht (about £58). www.lantadiver.com*



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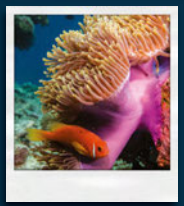
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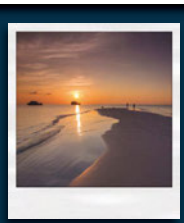
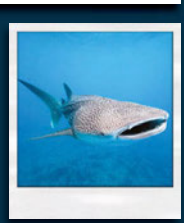
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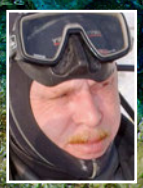
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The site isn't usually dived, but not far from Sharm is an intriguing military-vehicle graveyard. ALEXANDER KURAKIN digs into the back-story – photos by ANDREY NEKRASOV

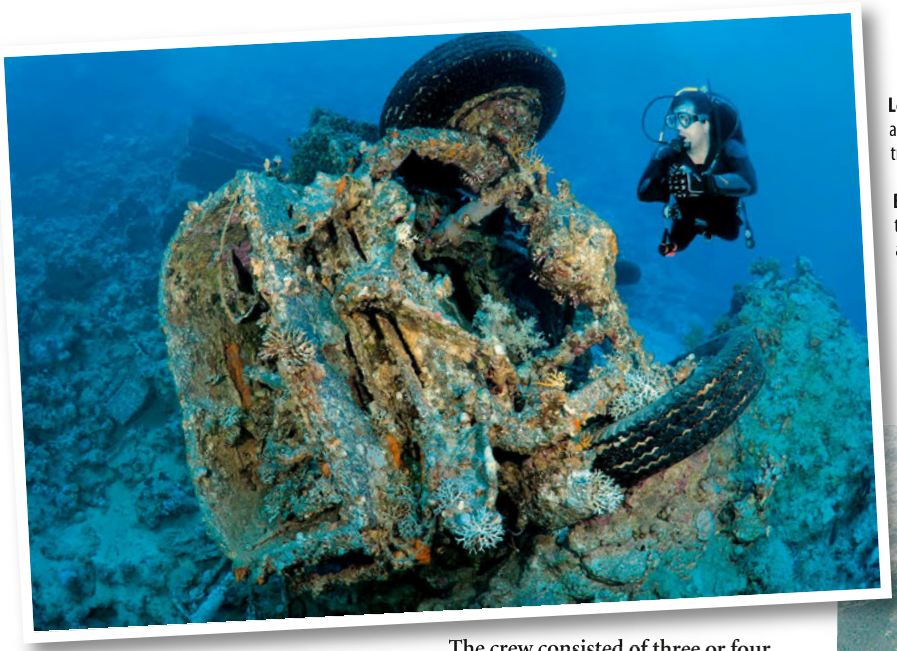
UNIVERSAL RESTING PLACE

FOLLOWING MY LAST RED SEA safari, I had the opportunity of visiting a little-known dive-site. Our liveaboard had returned to Sharm el Sheikh, and our last dive before leaving Egypt was at the entrance to the port used by international cruise ships.

Visiting this dive-site is not encouraged by the local authorities, and it isn't found in the diving guide-books, mainly because it's so close to the Travco customs zone port.

We were all quite tired after a full-on week of diving and already on our way home in our dreams, so perhaps we weren't paying full attention to the dive-guide's briefing. Some little-visited wreck... so what's so special about it? If it's little-visited, could that be because it's not all that interesting?

That's why when we reached the bottom my first thought was: "OK, where is your wreck?" We were at 35m and could see a large shape but there was no sign of a bow, decks or a superstructure. Had powerful storms transformed this sunken ship into a ☛



Left: Diver looking at an inverted Bedford truck.

Below: Overview of the armoured carrier and truck dump.

shapeless pile of metal?

However, it turned out not to be a ship, or indeed a single shape. As our eyes grew accustomed to the light levels we were able to pick out individual details; a wheel, a drive-shaft, the remains of a cabin – a truck? Tracks and drive-sprocket wheels – a tank? So where is the turret and the gun?

The wreckage didn't seem big enough for a tank, and in fact it was only half the size of a truck. It looked like an open soap-dish with two caterpillar tracks.

We were intrigued, and even more so when we saw a second, then a third, then five of these strange machines, not tanks but a different type of military conveyance altogether.

As we found out later, apart from the Bedford truck we had seen initially these were Mk1 Bren Carriers (otherwise known as Universal Carriers), made in England.

These armoured personnel-carriers were 3.7m long, 2.1m wide and weighed about 4 tons. An 85hp petrol engine gave them a top speed of about 30mph.

The crew consisted of three or four infantrymen in the body of the vehicle and a driver and a machine-gunner in the cabin. The vehicle had no roof, and its metal sides protected only the lower part of the crew's bodies (the cabin had a lowered floor) while the driver and gunner had only their heads exposed.

The Bren Carriers would tow loaded trailers and light artillery pieces. More than 100,000 units were produced to various specifications from the early 1930s until 1960, for use mainly by British and Commonwealth forces.

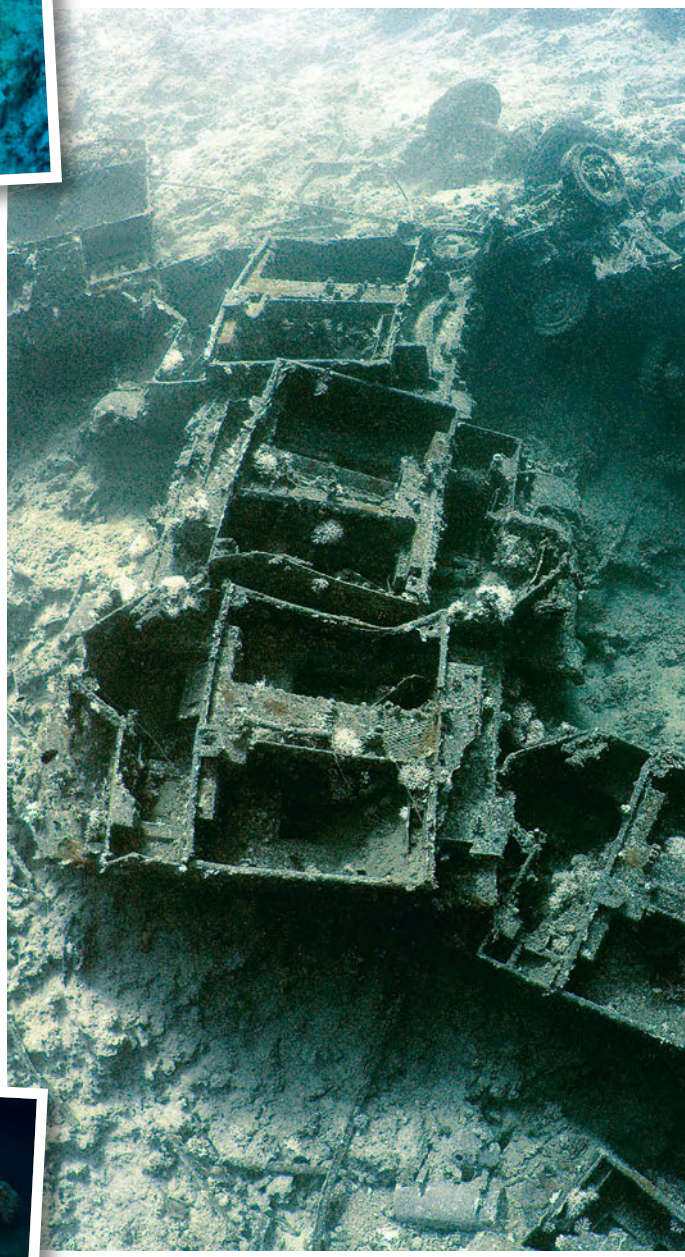
OUR GUIDE LED THE GROUP slowly along and upwards, examining the vehicles as we moved. The deeper machines were overlapping each other in some places, so it could be difficult to sort out what was what.

Closer to the surface, it was easier to distinguish individual vehicles. Some of them lay with their caterpillar tracks uppermost, some lay on their sides but others remained upright on their tracks.

At about 10m our group scattered, each buddy-pair finding their own armoured car. One of the divers settled himself in the driver's location to pose for a picture.

The last vehicle lay at a depth of 6m. All in all I reckon we had seen the remains of some five trucks and dozens of Bren Carriers.

We took a short break and settled on our course back, heading out to sea while shedding accumulated nitrogen. Appearing at the surface near the port's customs zone was not a desirable option.





Left: An inverted Bren Carrier.

Once well out from the shore we climbed back into our boat and departed back towards the liveaboard.

On most dives everyone tries to stay in the water as long as possible, but this time we had the opposite motivation, our curiosity driving us to surface and ask questions. How could all this stuff have got into the water here? There was no trace of a shipwreck nearby.

As soon as we reached the liveaboard a spontaneous debriefing started, and

that was when the dive-guide told us everything he knew about how these military vehicles got onto the seabed.

After the end of World War Two, as Israel started to form itself into an independent country, political tensions grew on the Sinai peninsula, erupting intermittently into active military confrontation.

To back up Egyptian forces in 1948 Britain gave them military equipment in the shape of Bedford trucks, Jeeps and the old-fashioned Bren Carrier Mk1 armoured personnel-carriers.



Right: A diver gets a closer look at an upright Universal Carrier.



A lull followed the first Arab-Israeli War from 1948-1949, but the dangerous situation continued to simmer. Egypt and Israel carried out subversive actions against each other, and Egypt took steps to restrict the movement of its eastern neighbour across the Suez Canal and in the Gulf of Aqaba.

This manoeuvring reached fever pitch in the summer of 1956, when Egypt declared the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. This step affected not only Israeli interests but also those of leading European states, including Britain.

The result was the Suez Crisis and Israeli troops, supported by Britain and France, crossed the border with Egypt on 29 October .

On 5 November, Sinai was seized when the Israelis' 9th Infantry Brigade took by storm the outpost with a strategic position in the Strait of Tiran – Sharm el Sheikh.

The USSR, the USA and the United Nations all became involved, and 15 November saw what can be considered the first deployment of the UN as a peace-keeping force, using newly formed units in the Suez Canal region.

France and England withdrew their troops from Sinai in December and the Israeli forces left the following March.

According to our dive-guide, the armoured carriers were pushed off a cliff either by Arab troops during the assault on Sharm or by the Israeli military as they left their war base in 1957.

Later I surfed the Internet and found that during the course of the war the Israelis had seized 460 vehicles, including Egyptian armoured carriers (they apparently had 283 Bren Carriers) and Bedford trucks.

The Israelis made use of any captured trophies that were in good condition and could be renovated, and even the unworkable vehicles had some scrap-metal value.

When they withdrew, they took all the military equipment with them.

So what happened to the vehicles we had seen? It's possible to reconstruct events with a fairly high level of confidence based on historical data and eyewitnesses' memories.

EARLY IN THE MORNING on 5 November, 1956, Sharm lay beneath a pall of black smoke that blotted out the sun. Storehouses were on fire following an air raid, and every now and again the silence would be broken by sub-machine gun fire from pockets of resistance around the town.

Trucks and armoured personnel- ☛



Right: Another view of one of the trucks.

carriers littered the streets. Israeli equipment and troops could be seen on the surrounding hills even without binoculars – Sharm was clearly doomed.

Urgent destruction of equipment was underway at a military base located on a high cape above the port. Fighting machines couldn't be allowed to fall into the hands of the Israelis, but there was no time to destroy every carrier or truck.

That's why they were taken to a steep cliff overlooking a narrow 2m strip of shoreline and pushed down into the sea.

THE RESULT WAS A HEAP of smashed vehicles near the foot of the cliff. Some still had their engines roaring, caterpillar tracks grinding and wheels turning, reluctant to accept their inevitable end.

More and more metal boxes fell, and the heap grew higher.

Carriers that had landed upright crawled amid grinding sounds into the waves as a rainbow oil slick grew. Eventually the heap reached critical mass and many of the vehicles tumbled into the sea.

That was nearly 60 years ago. Those vehicles that remained on the shore were partly broken up by the surf but it seems that most were recovered for scrap metal.



Above: A diver gets a driver's eye view from one of the Bren Carriers.

Of those still under water the finer details have almost been dissolved by corrosion but the bodies and caterpillar tracks remain in quite good condition.

Corals haven't really covered them, and the truck wheels are in particularly good condition, as corals don't grow on rubber. For now, this hard-to-reach underwater museum remains open for visitors with tanks on their backs.



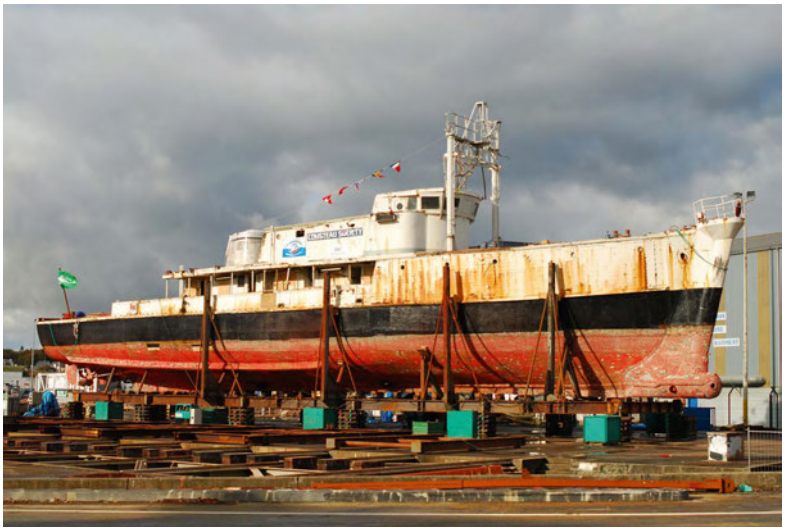


Monty HALLS

'AYE *CALYPSO*, I SING TO YOUR SPIRIT…'

TO SAIL ON A DREAM on a crystal clear ocean,
To ride on the crest of a wild raging storm
To work in the service of life and the living,
In search of the answers of questions unknown
To be part of the movement and part of the growing,
Part of beginning to understand,

Aye Calypso the places you've been to,
The things that you've shown us,
The stories you tell
Aye Calypso, I sing to your spirit,
The men who have served you so long and so well



OLIVIER BERNARD

So warbled John Denver in 1975, in a song dedicated to *Calypso* and the men who sailed her (and the woman – Jacques Cousteau's wife Simone was a constant presence on board, much more so than Jacques. She was so revered by the crew that she became known as "*La Bergere*" – the Shepherdess).

According to the lyrics I found online, Mr Denver goes on to sing "*Hi dee ay-ee ooo doo-dle oh, Oo do do do do do doo-dle ay yee, Doo-dle ay ee…..*" but I'm not sure that's relevant to what I have to say.

Although *Calypso* would seem to epitomise a free spirit, an ocean wraith flitting from place to place in search of adventure, what has happened to the ship since she sank at her mooring in Singapore in 1996 is nothing short of scandalous. It is almost sacrilege in diving to criticise the Cousteau family, but I fear I'm about to.

Jacques Cousteau was a remarkable man, of that there is no doubt. His legacy covers not just the last generation, but continues to run richly through diving for this one as well, and will echo long into the future.

COUSTEAU INFLUENCES everything we do today, and brought the world's attention to the plight of the oceans by creating films and TV programmes of mesmeric beauty.

He is the reason I'm writing this article today – he made me want to be a diver, to write about and film the marine world. He inspired the globe.

But he had a complicated private and professional life, to say the least.

It strikes me just how much he must have missed the simple pioneering days, when it was just him and a few close friends exploring the new kingdom to which only they held the keys.

In the latter stages of his life his business empire was vast and riven with debt, and his family had been torn apart.

He attempted to sue his own son for using the Cousteau name for a resort he wanted to open in Fiji, and the family became known less for their remarkable achievements, and more for their bitter internecine battles.

In the midst of all this sat *Calypso*, one of the most famous little vessels in the world. To a degree she belongs to that generation that accompanied Cousteau and his team on his voyages through his films and books.

BUT THAT, OF COURSE, is histrionic chuff. Because *Calypso* belongs to Equipe Cousteau, the foundation headed by Francine Cousteau, his second wife. An interesting quote appears prominently on the website, a quote that bristles with neurotic defiance:

"*Jacques-Yves Cousteau dies on 25 June 1997 in Paris, aged 87. The Board of Directors appoints his second wife, Francine Cousteau, a member of the board and head of Children's Programmes, as a custodian of his legacy and President of The Cousteau Society (TCS). At the time of its incorporation in 1973, Captain Cousteau had granted TCS an exclusive worldwide perpetual royalty-free licence to use his name, his image, his works, his signature and trademarks.*"

This was obviously not terrific news for the rest of the Cousteau family. And so the battles began – ferocious exchanges that continue to this day.

I can feel a migraine coming on just thinking about how complicated this all become. Should you have a dull moment, may I recommend going to the Equipe Cousteau website to see the timeline of the struggles involved in getting *Calypso* repaired. You'll need to go for a bit of a lie down in a dark room afterwards.

WHAT IS APPARENT is that we are still some way from seeing this valiant little vessel saved. I – like many a diver hearing of its predicament – briefly entertained a crazy thought of raising funds to save her. But it's not the money, it's not the logistics, and it's not the lack of empathy in the diving world. It's politics.

How sad then that *Calypso*, a symbol of freedom, the ship that launched a thousand dreams of the sea, is shackled to the land by the in-fighting and vitriol of those who should love her the most.

It's the last act that, after many adventures and escapades on the open sea, finally got the better of this valiant little vessel.

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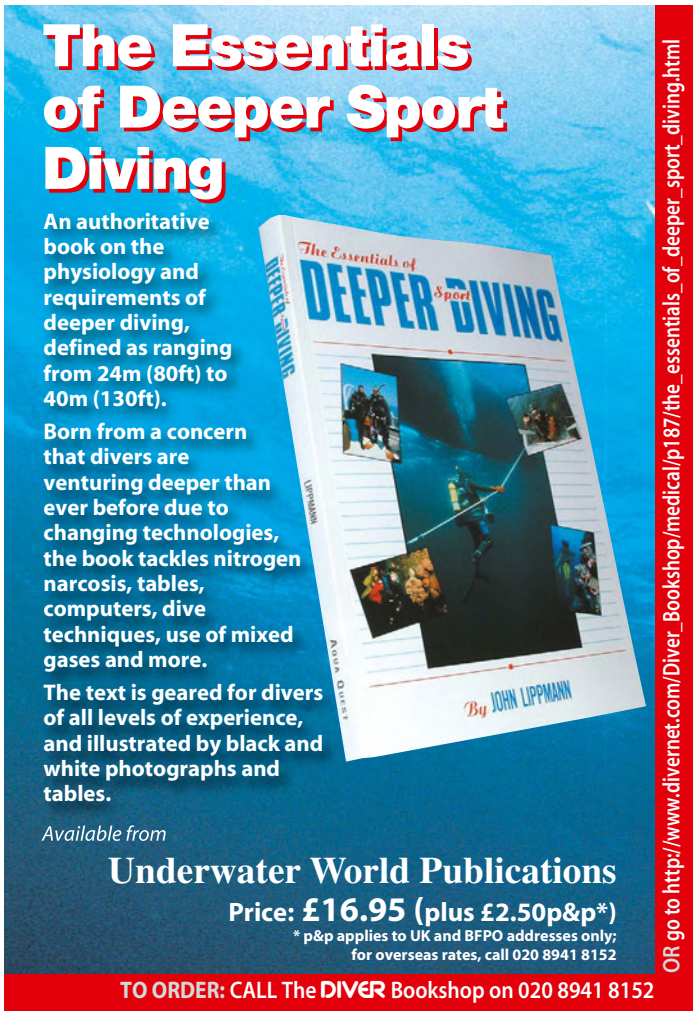
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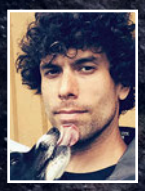
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IT'S FISSURE MAN!



JOEL STRICKLAND spends most of his time skydiving, but a trip to Iceland last November revealed an underwater experience that offered comparable sensations

IN THE SPRING OF 2013 I bought my first underwater camera, and I haven't looked back. I've had great fun using it, but admit to slow progress and varied levels of success.

As a child, I remember hearing stories of a place where you could walk down a valley between the continental shelves of Eurasia and the Americas as they crept further apart. It took years to discover the even-better part – as it turns out, you can dive there, too.

A handful of days at the end of a busy summer spent galloping from one airsports event to the next was all the time I really had to myself in 2014.

The combination of an offer from one of my skydiving students to add my name to the staff-list of a popular orangey budget airline, and a quick session of deductive filtering through a long list of European cities, saw me booked on a flight to Iceland's capital Reykjavik.

A hasty airport-transfer conversation in Amsterdam about the world and its offerings led the research for my trip towards the Silfra Fissure.

It had been a while since I had been under water, thanks to an altered situation and location, and my life had become filled for the most part with parachutes. I had never taken my eye off diving, however, and every now and then one can feel the universe lining things up for you.

As I headed out of Reykjavik in the direction of Thingvellir National Park, the thermometer in my tiny rental car displayed a flat zero.

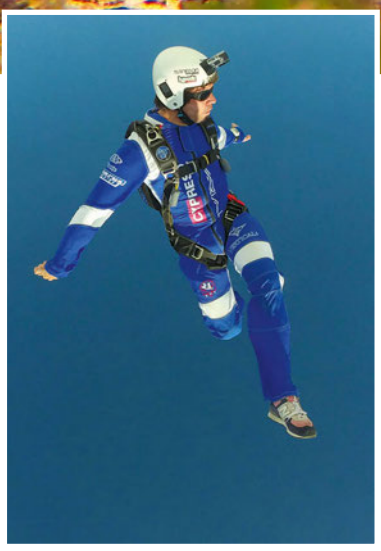
Thingvellir, as well as being eerily, resoundingly beautiful, is Iceland's place of greatest historical significance.

It was there that Iceland took the first formative steps toward becoming the impeccably civilised country it is today (which, as far as I have learned, meant its founders taking turns to talk while standing on a big rock).

I'm convinced that they picked this spot because of the long line of cliffs that shoulder the area. These provide some respite from the kind of wind that car-rental companies fear – they offer special insurance against its ability to tear the ☛

Above: Joel Strickland at the point in the Silfra Fissure where a diver can touch the tectonic plates of two continents at once.

THE CLARITY IS BEWILDERING, WITH ALL YOU CAN SEE ACROSS THE LAGOON'S 120m DIAMETER REMAINING PIN-SHARP



Left: The author's day job is as a skydiving instructor – the air-like clarity of the water in the Silfra Fissure made him feel right at home!

doors off small vehicles when they are opened excitedly in an exposed car park at some jaw-dropping natural wonder or other.

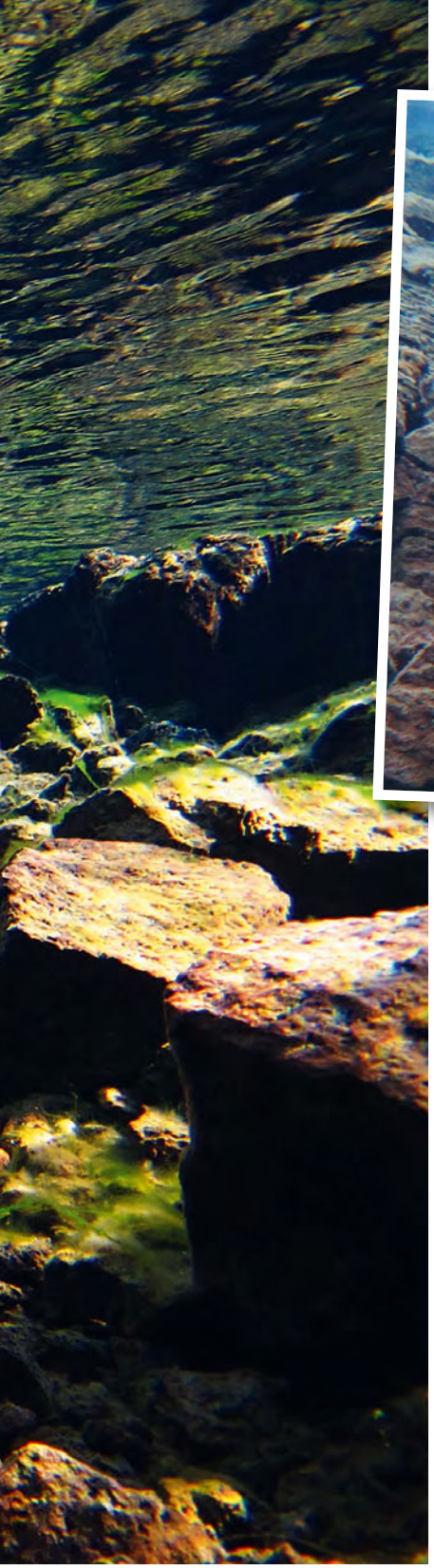
Iceland has a small population, most of whom live in the capital. Just a few miles out of the city the snowy road has clear tracks in just one direction, carved out by the daily procession of tourist transport heading the same way, to a popular sequence of awe-inspiring geological phenomena.

Some of the heavily modified off-road vehicles that cart the tourists about are gigantic. They look like the sort of thing I would have drawn when I was 10, down to the cartoonishly enormous tyres.

I worried less about the fierce wind trying to slide me off the road than I did about having to swerve to avoid one of these vehicles, and end up careening down the steep slopes at the side of the highway into the frosty tundra.

I feared that my miniature VW's sole concession to the conditions – the chunky tread of a set of winter tyres – would not help much if I was pancaked by a Land Cruiser the size of a house.

I had chosen a day on the Dive.is booking system that looked quiet, and





indeed there was only one other diver.

Our guide was Chris, an Englishman, though I had assumed he was Australian, as all his sentences ended in an upward inflection. That, however, can be the way with guides required to shepherd groups of strangers through an unfamiliar and possibly stressful activity day after day.

Chris reeled off the information we needed in a manner that showed that he had done this many times, but he was friendly and good at his job. As someone who has performed a similar function in a very different environment, I value this kind of no-fuss efficiency.

Despite the gap in my diving history I am quite well qualified (as was Matt from Tasmania) so Chris dispensed with the fluff and let us get on with it.

WE LINGERED TO GIVE ourselves a little space between the groups. Apprehensive-looking tourists waddled past like lines of ducklings behind their guides to snorkel the same route, not sure that this was what they wanted to be doing that day.

The steps into the water, complete with inch-thick ice, are very close to the point where the diverging land-masses initially cracked. The crack let in the fresh water that made it here through mile after mile of volcanic rock, filtering and purifying it to as good an example of perfection as I have to share.

A short distance from the start of the route is a separate pool where it is possible to access the network of caves.

This pool links to the start of the Silfra Route via an opening creatively titled Toilet – named for its ability to flush divers head-first down a 30m tunnel and out into the first part of the more sensible Silfra Hall.

The cave system here has been mapped to 63m by a US team, but with the regular seismic activity it is highly likely that the topography has altered since then.

These factors mean that overhead adventuring here is reserved for the gnarliest of explorers.

Having participated in some medium-strength penetration dives (and as someone who counts BASE-jumping high on his list of hobbies) I always shudder when I think of cave-diving.

Silfra Hall is the first section of the route that we have been briefed to think of as deep-shallow-deep-shallow. It's here

Left: The Silfra Lagoon.

Above: Joel and Matt in the second shallow section, after the Silfra Cathedral and just before turning into the Lagoon.

that the separating land-masses remain close enough to allow a diver to lay a hand on either side.

This is the only place where it is possible to do this on the entire Mid-Atlantic ridge – a geological enormity that runs almost the entire length of the ocean from Greenland to Antarctica.

It creates a bit of a bottleneck of divers as one after another we dutifully assume the position for a photo while touching both continental shelves.

The shallow sections of the dive are created in places where very frequent (in geological terms) upheavals have piled up loose rock shorn from the walls or deposited from above. It's a little like climbing over a mound of rubble, so care is required to negotiate a path.

SILFRA CATHEDRAL, the second deep section of the route, is as good a place as any in which to worship the majesty of the natural world as you swim its 100m length. While the canyon is not what some would consider deep – 20m here and there but averaging around 12m – the combination of the close walls and the clarity of the water instils in you a sense of great scale, especially from close to the surface.

It is not unknown every once in a while for an unsuspecting snorkeller to abandon the whole thing, based on a sudden vertigo-induced panic attack.

The water is so clear that eyes and brain are unable to process that it is holding you up above the rocks below.

This part is everything I could ask for from a scenic dive, and well worth the effort and admission price on its own.

The spring at the head of the fissure



creates some small current through Silfra, but it is only really noticeable along the second shallow section of the dive, where the water from the voluminous Cathedral pushes and squeezes through, trying gently but firmly to carry you with it out into the lake, instead of making the left turn into the final area of the route.

Silfra Lagoon is the aptly named finale – a huge shallow bowl with gently sloping sides that offers up its own comforting version of beauty in contrast to the drama of what has come before.

There are fish in the lake, but here they are little more than a rumour – yet the absence of life seems to attune your senses to the scenery all the more.

Again the clarity is bewildering, with all you can see across the Lagoon's 120m diameter remaining pin-sharp.

I AM JUST OVER 6ft 6in. As a result of my enormousness, rental gear can be a dicey prospect, but the drysuit provided had not been bad, letting me down only once when I craned my neck a little too far, and felt a small escape of air replaced by an icy trickle to the base of my spine.

The resulting lapse in concentration was the only time I stirred up a cloud of silt from the bottom into what was otherwise the clearest water I have ever seen.

As a small boy at the NASA facility in Houston I stood with my face pressed against the glass of those colossal training pools and watched astronauts practise extra-vehicular activity around the full-scale exterior of a Space Shuttle.

The clarity of the Silfra water reminded me more of those pools than any of the other dives I have done.

When the air temperature drops below freezing at Silfra the operators tend to do one extended dive, because things with moving parts, both mechanical and human, freeze up and become prone to damage or failure.

So we dived for about 45 minutes,

Above: Sunset over Silfra.

lingering in places of particular beauty but with no rush to get through the five named sections of the dive.

The scenery was spectacular. The cobalt-blue water hides nothing from view in the long canyons, so the vista is unobscured as far as you can see in any direction.

My rusty skills meant that I could have used a little more weight, as I needed a bit more air in my suit to avoid the chilliness I felt during the last few minutes.

Don't be put off by the chance of cold weather limiting your visit to a single dive. We were encouraged to swim at any pace we wished and take as long as energy, air and temperature allowed. At no point did I feel stiffed out of that second dive.

Whatever wild weather spirits are in charge of this land looked favourably on us, and the sun was out when we surfaced. We trudged happily back to the vehicles for the hot chocolate Chris had brought, and the extra cookies I had asked him to remember.

Surrounded on every side for hundreds of miles by proper ocean, Iceland has weather. It's neither nestled among other islands nor tucked in against a continental mass like the UK.

You can look out to the horizon and see the whole menu of systems and fronts lining up against each other.

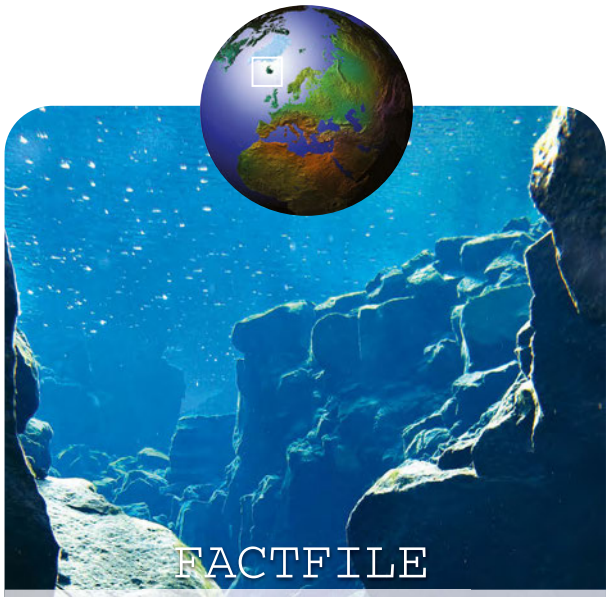
Sideways snow gives way to sideways hail and then some sideways sunshine, because it is the tail-end of November and the sun doesn't get much above the horizon. However, it does magnificent things to the clouds and the landscape throughout all six hours of daylight.

ICELAND IS UTTERLY beautiful, as is diving at Silfra. In places the country looks like a sci-fi planetscape from a 1960s fantasy movie, and in others like the waterfall-draped fairy garden from a children's book.

Somehow it feels more connected to the formation and evolution of the Earth than anywhere else I've seen.

A short drive on from Thingvellir takes you to a place where the planet celebrates how awesome it is by every few minutes joyously squirting a lot of hot water high into the air.

If it's possible for humans to perceive such a thing, you can feel the youth of the planet there.



FACTFILE

GETTING THERE ▸▸ EasyJet flies to Keflavik airport, 30 miles south-west of Reykjavik. Silfra is in Thingvellir National Park, about 28 miles north-east.

DIVING ▸▸ Dive.is

ACCOMMODATION ▸▸ Joel used airbnb.co.uk to find a budget room in an apartment with Rekyjavik locals.

WHEN TO GO ▸▸ In winter when daylight lasts only a few hours, tour operators offer a mid-morning dive at Silfra. In summer, when the sun barely dips, you can start morning or afternoon.

CURRENCY ▸▸ Icelandic krona.

PRICES ▸▸ Dive Worldwide offers its three-day Silfra Diving Weekend from June-September from £995pp for flights, three nights' B&B at Center Hotel Plaza (two sharing), two dives at Silfra, dive gear, sightseeing and transfers. Arctic Direct has a six-night Wonders of Iceland deal for £2395 including flights, all transport, seven dives including Silfra, kit rental or 40kg baggage allowance, and sightseeing, www.arcticdirect.co.uk

VISITOR INFORMATION ▸▸ www.iceland.is

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At Arctic Direct, we specialise in spectacular excursions all over the Arctic, and unsurprisingly, Silfra is pretty high to the top of most peoples' to-do lists - after all, it is the only place where you can dive directly into the crack between two continental plates!

As well as offering stunning dive holidays to Silfra, we also offer a number of other Icelandic destinations including Garður, Óttastaðir, Bjarnagjá, and Strýtan – the only geothermal chimney that can be reached by recreational divers.

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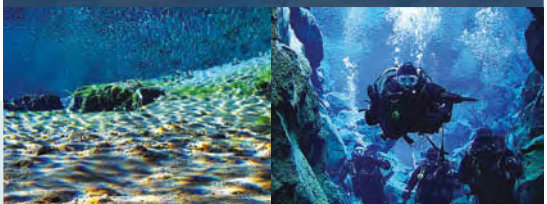
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Oceans six

International Ocean Film Tour Vol 2
(Film Show & DVD)
Keen

THE SECOND *OCEAN FILM TOUR* is a German initiative, two hours' worth of short watersports- and sealife-related films that are being shown in the UK for five nights as part of a 70-city European tour from 15-21 May.

For those who miss the screenings, in Plymouth, London, Bristol, Glasgow and Edinburgh, a DVD will be available this summer.

Only two of the six films relate directly to scuba-diving. One of these, *(R)evolution*, is 28 minutes long and the latest from Canadian film-maker Rob Stewart, best-known for his award-winning full-length documentary from 2006, *Sharkwater*.

(R)evolution has also won recent film-festival awards, and while it is heavy with the kind of apocalyptic environmental messsages so familiar to divers, Stewart knows how to press the right buttons to make such messages digestible.

His talking heads are restricted to bite-sized slots, positive messages are embedded here and there to lighten the gloom, and the underwater sequences that represent what is under threat are more ravishing than revolting, from sailfish with baitballs to pygmy seahorses and flamboyant cuttlefish hatchlings. If the message is important, so is compelling packaging.

The Crystal Labyrinth, directed by Bryan Smith & David Pearson, is only 22 minutes long but it's probably as good a condensation of what cave-diving is all about as you'll see.

It concerns two obsessive US divers, Brian Kakuk and Brett Hemphill, determined to link Dan's and Ralph's, two labyrinthine caves beneath Abaco in the Bahamas, into one system.

As so often, we watch the divers fin through magnificent chambers and think what a kick such dives must be. The next minute we see them trying to squeeze through near-impossible restrictions and – I think I speak for many open-water divers here – wonder how in hell they can get their mind into the right place to do that, let alone their bodies. This film succeeds in making you catch your breath.

Three of the other films are about surfing, windsurfing and wake-boarding, always spectacular and easy on the eye but really just collections of action sequences.

But the sixth film, the longest at 35 minutes, is *And Then We Swam* by Ben Finney, and for me it steals the show.



The Crystal Labyrinth.





(R)evolution.

Although its underwater footage is incidental to the main action (and the immersions are not entirely voluntary), this production stayed with me.

It's about two young Brits, Ben Stenning and James Adair, who have barely rowed before or spent a night at sea, and seem to be sleepwalking into taking up the daunting challenge of rowing 3500 miles across the stormy Indian Ocean from Australia to Mauritius – with no support boat. The feat has never been achieved before.

What's more, one of the raw rowers spent a teenage year completely paralysed by an illness, and has never fully recovered. And just as the end of their self-inflicted ordeal seems to be in sight, the sea takes over.

It's a great story, mostly self-recorded, very funny and inspiring, and its inclusion here ensures that no one who loves the marine world should be disappointed by the *Ocean Film Tour* package. Recommended.

Steve Weinman

International Ocean Film Tour, £14, www.oceanfilmtour.com
DVD, Moving Adventures Medien, 19 euros, shop.oceanfilmtour.com

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING DIVING BOOKS

as listed by www.amazon.co.uk (19 March, 2015)

1. **Stars Beneath the Sea: The Extraordinary Lives of the Pioneers of Diving,** by Trevor Norton
2. **Reef Fish Identification: Tropical Pacific,** by Gerald Allen, Roger Steene & Paul Humann
3. **Manual of Freediving: Underwater on a Single Breath,** by Umberto Pelizzari & Stefani Tovaglieri
4. **Fifty Places to Dive Before You Die,** by Chris Santella
5. **Dive Maldives: A Guide to the Maldives Archipelago,** by Tim Godfrey
6. **Dive Scapa Flow,** by Rod MacDonald
7. **The Dive Sites of Cozumel and the Yucatan,** by Lawson Wood
8. **Scuba Confidential: An Insider's Guide to Becoming a Better Diver,** by Simon Pridmore
9. **Open Water Diver Manual,** by Drew Richardson
10. **Scuba Diving,** by Monty Halls & Miranda Krestovnikoff

DEAD AND DYING

Coral Reefs: Secret Cities
***Under The Sea* (exhibition)**
Natural History Museum, London

THERE IS A HUGE AMOUNT to see at London's Natural History Museum, and even more dusty treasures hidden from view in its archives. Admission is free, but like most big museums the NHM periodically repackages certain of its own and borrowed artefacts for display to a paying audience.

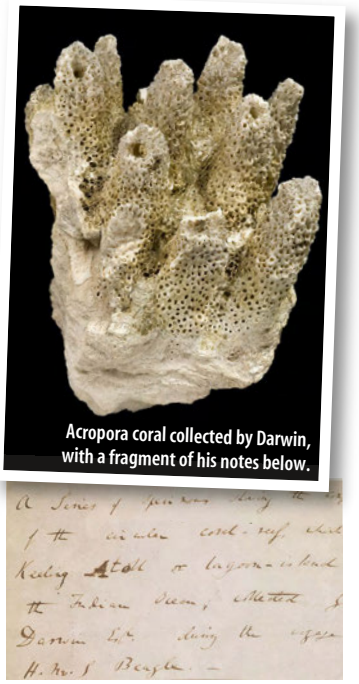
Coral Reefs: Secret Cities of the Sea costs a tenner for an adult to enter. So is it worth the price of entry?

I must be honest – fascinating as I find the NHM, and worthy as its scientific researches are, ever since my childhood its stuffed and replica animals, skeletons and fossils have given it something of the creepy feel of a vast Victorian curiosity shop to me.

Over the years it has taken huge strides to remove that whiff of formaldehyde, but with a subject such as coral the challenge is to match what divers know to be the vibrant rainbow nature of a living reef with the dead, washed-out condition of things in glass cases.

So while it's of great academic interest to view some 250 of the museum's dead coral and reef creature specimens side by side, especially the actual corals collected by Charles Darwin during HMS *Beagle*'s voyage in the 1830s alongside some of the great man's notes, I somehow doubt whether this is a show to get the popular pulse racing.

True, there is a 4-tonne tank



Acropora coral collected by Darwin, with a fragment of his notes below.



The aquarium includes 26 species of coral.

PHOTOS: NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM



The giant grouper is impressive.

containing 40 live fish species and 26 species of coral, although compared with what you might see at a public aquarium this proves to be less spectacular than you might expect.

And the promised virtual dives provided by sponsor Catlin's Seaview Survey consists of a series of 360° reef images that can be navigated using a joystick.

This interactive experience was not as thrilling as I had perhaps led my three-year-old grandson Sam to believe when I was encouraging him to join me in the magical world of coral.

Although he is always polite in indulging my whims, I could see that he was anxious to get back to his beloved dinosaurs in the outer halls.

Catlin Group clearly undertakes valuable reef conservation work with its Seaview Surveys, but you can go to Google Maps any time for a relaxed virtual dive with the insurer, without impatient families waiting their turn behind you.

Overfishing, pollution, ocean warming and acidification are posing major challenges to coral reefs, which are deteriorating at the rate of 1-2% per year, as the NHM rightly reminds us. "Fifty per cent of corals have been lost in the last 30 years," it says.

So the situation is indeed serious, and if placing us temporarily in a world of dessicated coral and long-dead reef-life helps to bring home that message, I have to say that this exhibition works a treat!

Steve Weinman

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FIVE WAYS TO DIVE SUDAN



LEONARDO OLMI



Luxury Yacht Maldives Fleet's 30m Turkish gulet-style liveaboard *San Marco* is now operating in Sudanese waters in the southern Red Sea, and taking advantage of new weekly Fly Dubai flights to facilitate access for visitors to its Port Sudan base.

The vessel visits the reefs of Sanganeb and Shaab Rumi, the remains of Jacques Cousteau's *Precontinente II*, the *Umbria* and *Blue Belt* wrecks and Angarosh, "the cradle of sharks".

Rarely visited southern reefs are accessed, as are the sunken ruins of Suakin when conditions allow (usually in March). Manta rays, grey and hammerhead sharks are possible sightings, and you get three dives a day from one of three 6m tenders.

The *San Marco* operates five itineraries in Sudan between October and June: The Best Of, which it says is well suited to first-timers in these waters; The Far North with hopes of seeing large predators; North One-Way for divers pushed for time; Classic and South Together; and Into the Wild for lesser-known sites.

Starting price for a seven-night cruise is 950 euros, full board (two sharing), 16 dives a week including night dives and transfers.

luxuryyachtmaldives.com



Two-month Fiji/Thailand combo

Global Vision International sets up overseas volunteer gap-year programmes, including diving, but now for the first time it is offering combination projects so that volunteers can work in more than one country and/or on more than one type of project on a single trip.

A combo aimed at divers (minimum PADI Open Water Diver or equivalent) puts Fiji and Thailand together in the same frame. On Caqalai Island and in the Dawasamu District on Viti Levu in Fiji you can join a marine-conservation expedition collecting data through research dives.

Then you move to the province of Phang Nga in Thailand to assist in conservation of its coastal and marine eco-systems in the Andaman Sea.

This eight-week programme costs £3045, which covers shared accommodation and PADI Advanced Open Water Diver, Coral Reef Research Diver speciality and project training plus a variety of workshops. You pay for all flights, including between Fiji and Thailand.

The next departures are on 19 September, 14 November and 9 January, 2016.

GVI's flagship dive programme is a 30-week Marine Conservation Internship and PADI Instructor Development Course in Mexico costing from £8745. Next starting dates for this are 29 June, 19 September and 9 January, 2016.

www.gvi.co.uk

CritterFest for next year

"In my opinion, Anilao rivals, if not beats, Lembeh for small critters," says underwater photographer Bruce Shafer, who gets a chance to demonstrate this during a 10-Day workshop and "Complete Underwater Photography Experience" based at the Crystal Blue Resort in the Philippines destination.



STEVE WENMAN

Sharing hosting duties with Mike Bartick, the event takes place from 20-30 January next year and costs US $1999. You get daily photo clinics with Bartick and "digital darkrooms" with Shafer, image reviews, 10 nights full board (two sharing), nine days of up to four boat dives a day including night dives, park fees and transfers to and from Manila.

Flights are not included and unlimited nitrox costs $99 extra.

scubashafer@comcast.net or mike@divecbr.com

Awards in brief

Red Sea and Maldives operator Emperor Divers has been given the Gold Trusted Merchant Award 2015 in recognition of its service standards by global ratings and guest reviews provider Feefo. The accreditation is based on customer feedback.

www.emperordivers.com

Pro Dive Mexico, the PADI 5* Dive Resort with nine centres in the Riviera Maya and Cozumel, Mexico, has DAN Industry Partner recognition. This indicates implementation of strict safety and emergency standards.

www.prodivemex.com

Azores afloat and discounts all round

Ultimate Diving is the latest tour operator to boost its Azores offerings. The addition of liveaboard diving from motor yacht *BrizAzores* enables divers to get round all the popular sites easily and have a chance of seeing sperm whales into the bargain, it says.

A seven-night trip costs from £1159pp until August, including flights and transfers, cabin-only accommodation, diving and equipment rental. Readers can claim a £50 discount by quoting "Dive Azores with Ultimate Diving".

Ultimate is also now selling the Hotel Colombo on Santa Maria in the south-east, the only Azores island with a white sandy beach.

The operator says Santa Maria is popular with divers hoping to see whale sharks escorted by thousands of tuna and pilotfish, as well as mobula rays in summer, and adds that 55 dive-sites surround Santa Maria.

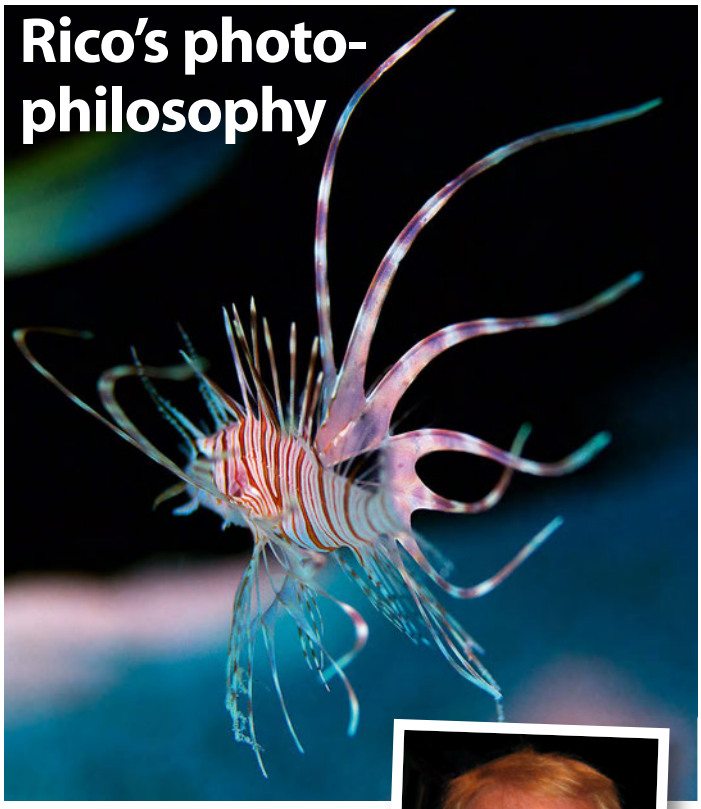
Paying £899pp gets you flights, transfers, seven nights' half board and 10 dives in May and June. Obtain a £20 discount by quoting as above.

And talking of discounts, you can claim £150 off any of Ultimate's 2015 itineraries in the Maldives by quoting "Dive Maldives with Ultimate Diving".

www.ultimatediving.co.uk



Rico's photo-philosophy



RICO BESSERDICH



Red Sea resort Sharks Bay Umbi Diving Village near Na'ama Bay is putting on its first Underwater Photography Workshop from 23-30 May. It is hosted by German photo-journalist Rico Besserdich (*right*), whose philosophy is that "successful photography does not depend on the technology used but on the eyes and the mind of the photographer." So no worries if you use a cheap compact!

Besserdich says his goal is to help students master different techniques while developing their own unique style and personal vision. With a small group he aims to provide plenty of individual coaching.

The price of 649 euros pp includes airport transfers, five-day workshop with evening presentations and sessions, three days' shore-diving with three dives a day and two days' boat-diving with two dives a day, seven nights' half-board accommodation in a double beach cabin, barbecue night and free nitrox.

www.sharksbay.com

DO THE DIVES – THEN WATCH THE WORLD CUP!

If you want to get in some Red Sea diving at the end of summer but don't want to miss out on the international rugby, Diverse Travel has the answer in the oval shape of its Special World Cup Rugby Dive Tour.

The trip runs from Saturday, 26 September to Sunday 4 October and is hosted by the tour operators Jim and Cary Yanny (*pictured*).



You can look forward to six days' diving with Emperor Divers (that's two boat-dives a day) and eight nights' B&B accommodation, along with reserved seating at the Tavern Bar to watch at least six live games, including England, South Africa, Wales, Scotland, Australia, Samoa and Fiji.



There's a final-night barbecue party and commemorative shirt too, and the price from £899 covers return flights between London Gatwick and Sharm with Monarch Airlines and transfers.

"What a great combination – diving and rugby!" says an excited Jim. "Everyone can join in and enjoy a truly international spirit while happy in the knowledge that they have a reserved seat for the rugby and reserved boats for the diving. Win, win!"

www.diversetravel.co.uk

WELL AND TRULY TESTED



Five new products tested, several concerned with maintaining warmth, and all the while NIGEL WADE manages to stay clear of the cold water – so how does that work?

HEATED VEST
URSUIT FIR DEEP HEAT SYSTEM





Top: Ursuit FIR Deep Heat Vest at the top of a freezing Empire State Building.

Above: Infra-red heating elements.

KEEPING WARM IN A COLDWATER environment has become an extremely hi-tec business in recent years. Dive-kit manufacturers have been employing their R&D teams to find innovative ways of heating our bodies so that we can dive all year round, or get under water in frigid destinations that have been no-go areas in the past.

Battery-powered undergarments with heating wires have been the common solution – until, that is, the discovery of Far Infra Red (FIR) ray technology for divers. Finland- based Ursuit has incorporated this method of keeping warm into a vest, and I've been trying it out.

FIR Technology

Ursuit's Deep Heat system employs Far Infra Red rays, the same electromagnetic radiation as found in our normal surroundings with radio waves, microwaves, X-rays and sunlight.

FIR radiation penetrates the human body to a depth of around 50mm, exciting our molecules and thereby warming the blood and tissues.

At first glance this looked scary. Would it boil my blood; was I going to suffer any long-term damage to my vital organs; more importantly, was I going to glow in the dark?

Following exhaustive research (a Google search) I found that FIR is widely used in healthcare, one of its advantages being that it promotes the growth of white blood cells, which in turn boost our natural immune system. So the heating system is apparently safe and natural.

The Design

The vest resembles a waistcoat and is made from a stretchy polyamide elastane mix with a polyester fleece lining.

It has three FIR pad pockets – two at the chest either side of the front zipper and a larger single pocket across the middle of the back.

A further two pockets at the front of the hips take the rechargeable 8.4V li-ion battery. This powers the exothermic heating elements and has an O-ring sealed screw-down connector. The elements and connecting wires are removable from the vest so that it can be washed.

The controls are accessed via a single rubberised button on the battery-pack that acts as an on-off switch, with a set sequence of pushes to scroll through the three heat settings – high 60°, medium 50° and low 40°C – and to lock or unlock the system. The battery compartment vibrates for a second to confirm that the settings have changed.

Burntimes (pun intended) are substantial. On full heat the battery lasted for around 360 minutes, giving plenty of time to pre-heat the body and to stay warm when the dives are over and wind-chill becomes a potential problem.

The FIR thermal modules are sealed in heat-welded PVC covers to keep the whole system waterproof.

In Use

I visited New York City at the end of February. Temperatures had plummeted to levels not felt since the 1930s, and the Hudson River between Manhattan and New Jersey was solid with ice floes. Real-feel air temperatures fell to around -17°C, and clear skies meant that it was even colder at night.

I wore the Ursuit vest under my jacket and over a long-sleeved T-shirt. The pads heated quickly, warming my skin initially, and about five minutes later I felt the invigorating effect as the

infra-red heat penetrated my body.

Warm blood means warm hands, feet and head, and all my extremities felt toasty. The Arctic conditions paled into insignificance.

One of the things to do in the Big Apple is to visit the top of the Empire State Building. This wasn't as straightforward as I had expected, because with security rightly a priority I had to explain why I was wearing a vest with wires in it while trying to access one of the world's most iconic buildings.

Thankfully the security staff had seen this type of heated garment before and allowed me up to the top while still wearing it. They did however confiscate my camera tripod.

Back on home soil I took the vest to my local inland dive-site at Wraysbury. I intended to put it through its paces under water but unfortunately discovered a leak in my drysuit.

However, Wraysbury's owner Richard Major had been using the Ursuit system throughout the winter and was adamant that without it he wouldn't have been in the water as much as he had. "It's made the difference between an hour's dive in water that's been as low as 4°C or bottling out with a stay in the warm clubhouse," he said.

The fact that the FIR penetrates the body means that the user's core temperature remains stable. This in turn keeps the blood flowing to the extremities, so your hands, feet and head stay warm, a real advantage over heating elements that just warm the surface areas of the skin.

SPECS

PRICE ›› **£300**
SIZES ›› **M, L, XL**
POWER LEVELS ›› **High-60°C, Med-50°C, Low-40°C**
BURNTIMES ›› **High 3hr, Low 5hr**
POWER ›› **8.4V li-ion rechargeable battery**
CHARGER ›› **110-240V mains**
CONTACT ›› **www.liquidsports.co.uk**
DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★★★★☆

Conclusion

This FIR technology isn't as scary as I first thought; in fact it's as natural as sunlight warming the body, with the added advantage of no ultra-violet rays to burn the skin. The Ursuit FIR Deep Heat System vest isn't a unique concept in the dive-kit world, but offers a great solution to the challenges of coldwater diving.



Vest battery and controller.

It certainly works for icy land-based activities, and according to the guys at Wraysbury it has worked wonderfully under water throughout the freezing winter months, making the vital difference between calling a dive off or actually taking the plunge. ■

HOOD/GLOVES PROBE **I-DRY**

CAST YOUR MIND BACK TO YOUR LAST cold-weather dive outing. Do you remember that horrible feeling as you pulled a cold, wet hood over your head for a second dive and then struggled with that "grippy-when-wet" internal lining on your gloves as you struggled to get them on or off?

Australian-based Probe reckons it has a solution to such problems in its iDry fleece-lined wetsuits and accessories, which are now available in the UK. The **DIVER** test team put Probe's hood and gloves through their paces.

Quick-Dry Technology

Probe has developed a hydrophobic fleece that repels water. It has a pink, wool-like texture that is used to line the wetsuit product range and is labelled Quick-Dry.

The outer skins are constructed using Probe's Super-stretch neoprene, while the seams are blind-stitched and double-glued to reduce water penetration.

The Design

The iDry 5mm hood is fully lined with the Quick-Dry technology fleece. The face opening has a soft glide-skin seal and is 3D-contoured for a good fit, while the back of the hood ☛



Alex with 2mm gloves in 7° C water.

features a gel gripper print to help keep a mask-strap in position.

The gloves are made from 2mm Super-Stretch neoprene with a full Quick-Dry fleece lining. The seams are vulcanised to provide extra durability and the palms have a gel gripper print to aid traction when wet.

Both products are finished with subtle screen-printed red and blue livery.

In the Water

The team visited Wraysbury on the morning that the moon covered the sun to provide a rare solar eclipse. What wasn't so rare was the fact that I volunteered to stay on land and take the photos while Alex and Bruce took the gloves and hood for a dive in the clear 7°C waters at London's house-reef.

I was feeling a little guilty asking Alex to test 2mm gloves when in reality the minimum thickness in these conditions should have been 5mm, so I kept his own 5mm three-finger mitts on standby just in case.

After 40 minutes of exposure his mitts had stayed in my pocket. A tribute to the Probe iDry gloves or to Alex's perseverance? As it turned out it was the former, with him reporting that his hands had stayed as warm as he would have expected from the thicker versions.

The hood was perfect for the conditions. I turned the gloves and hood inside-out, gave them a shake to dislodge the water drops and stood them up on a bench while the boys drank a well-earned cuppa.

After only half an hour the pink Quick-Dry fleece was living up to its name. It was bone-dry to the touch, even though the neoprene was still sodden on the outside.

Next dive it was Bruce's turn to give the gloves a go.

After the second dive he reported having colder hands than he had expected, though he wasn't thinking of stopping the dive to get a thicker pair. Again, the hood performed as well as anticipated.

Conclusion

After the dives, both the guys commented on how easy the accessories were to don and doff, especially when wet.

They also remarked on the soft feel of the fleece against their skin and the high degree of dexterity the gloves offered compared to their own.

I look forward to checking out other products from this range of soft-lined quick-to-dry dive gear. ■



Probe 2mm iDry gloves, with Quick Dry lining.



Probe iDry 5mm hood, with Quick Dry fleece lining.

SPECS

PRICE ›› **Hood, £40. Gloves, £42**
MATERIAL ›› **Super-Stretch Neoprene, Quick-Dry fleece lining**
SIZES ›› **Hood: S, M, L, XL**
Gloves: XS, S, M, L, XL
COLOUR ›› **Black, red and blue livery**
CONTACT ›› **www.amphibian-sports.co.uk**
DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★★★★☆



Gel grip printing helps to prevent mask-strap slippage.

BAG

ND VOYAGER LIGHTWEIGHT HOLDALL



THE QUEST TO FIND THE PERFECT LUGGAGE to carry my dive kit around the world has taken a new turn. In the past I wouldn't have considered a bag that had wheels because of the extra weight involved eating into the paltry baggage allowances offered by airlines.

Last month I reported my experience at the airport in Barbados when transiting to another Caribbean destination. I was made to pay a porter US $10 to move a pair of holdalls 200m, whereas if my bags had sported wheels I would have moved them myself and been able to spend the money on beer instead.

Northern Diver has a new bag in its range called the Voyager Lightweight Holdall, and the word "Lightweight" grabbed my attention.

I asked the company for a sample and took it on a trip to New York to see how it fared.

The Design

The Voyager Lightweight is a hybrid between a wheeled bag with an internal frame and telescoping handle and a simple lightweight holdall.

It has a pair of wheels set into a hard plastic base but lacks a heavy frame and pulling handle. Instead the bag has two padded webbing handles and a single clip-on webbing tow strap.

The bag is made from rip-stop nylon with two zipped compartments; the main compartment has a horseshoe-shaped zip and a flap that features a mesh pocket inside, and a separate end compartment for ancillary gear.

A top handle that is part of a wrap-round webbing cradle and further carry-handles at each end are included to allow versatility when lifting. A hard PVC protective base houses the wheels, with guards to protect the corners and a pair of external rigid runners providing rigidity and protection to the bottom of the bag.

The bag has a capacity of 136 litres and weighs in at 3.8kg.

In Use

A shortage of scheduled dive-trips saw me take clothes and camera accessories to the Big Apple for a long weekend's break. I saw it as an ideal opportunity to test out this Northern Diver bag.

Filled to capacity with two lots of Arctic-style clothing to cope with the sub-zero American winter, and what seemed like 20 pairs of my wife's shoes and boots, plus some unbreakable photography accessories, the bag and contents weighed a touch under our 23kg allowance.

I pulled it across the car park at Heathrow and into the terminal building with ease, and the wide wheelbase meant that there was no problem with the bag twisting or tipping, so making the whole operation a doddle.

At New York's JFK airport I sniggered as I saw people straightening out five-dollar bills before poking them into the non-refundable trolley-release machine. I coolly strolled by with the Voyager in tow, a smile on my face.

The bag is all-black on the outside with red piping and subtle livery. The inside lining is all-red, which makes finding gear a simple task. There's nothing more annoying than rummaging around for black items that have seemingly vanished into a big black interior.

The bag went through the baggage-handler's torture chamber both on the way out and again on our return without so much as a bruise or blemish.

SPECS

PRICE ›› **£75**
CAPACITY ›› **136 litres**
WEIGHT ›› **3.8kg**
SIZE ›› **81 x 40 x 42cm**
COLOUR ›› **Black / red**
CONTACT ›› **www.ndiver.com**
DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★★★★☆



The bag can be pulled by its handles.

Conclusion

I've packed the bag ready for my next dive trip. It's taken everything I think I'll need plus some clothes and toiletries, and it weighs a total of 24kg. I might have to lose a T-shirt and a couple of pairs of undercrackers to appease the muggers at check-in.

The pleasing factor is that it's so close to the weight of my standard duffle, only with wheels, and I see that as a victory in the travelling diver's world. ■

APPAREL

DIVESANGHA HOODIE & MICROFIBRE TOWEL


Divesangha Hoodie.

ARE YOU ONE OF THOSE DIVERS WHO WANT your clothing to scream at the world: "I'm a diver and I'm proud", wearing T-shirts sporting loud, in-your-face graphics, leaving no one in any doubt about your involvement in the sport?

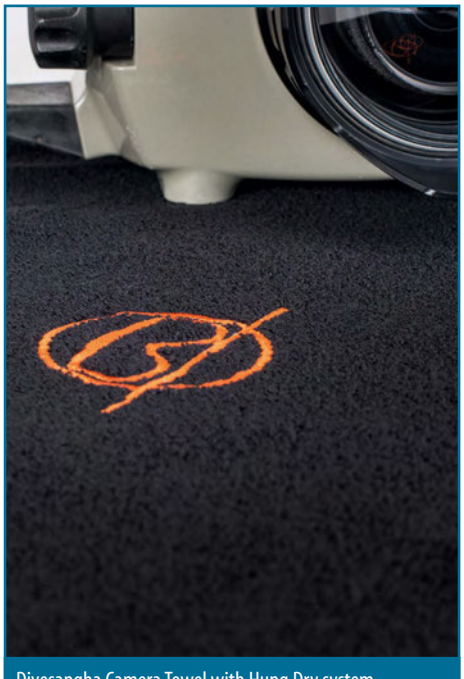
Or do you prefer a more discreet approach, with understated clothing with stylish, subtle livery whispering your association with the dive community. If the latter, read on, because UK-based Divesangha has some new additions to its range of apparel and accessories.

Hoodie Design

Designed for all-season wear, the Divesangha Hoodie is made from a polyester, cotton-blend Technospacer fabric that provides thermal insulation and breathability. The hood is lined with a soft fleece without drawstrings and the logo is embroidered inside at the neck.

The men's (featured) has a full two-way zip, while the women's version is a pullover design, and both come in one colour, a light grey marl.

As with all Divesangha clothing the hoodies feature the company's Hung-Dry system with buttons and corresponding button-holes at the hem, enabling the garments to be hung out to dry virtually anywhere.


Divesangha Camera Towel with Hung Dry system.

The hoodies are loose-fit for comfort and layering and the maker's "Diver in Mask" logo is embroidered on the chest of the men's and the sleeve of the women's in aqua blue and orange respectively. The garments are machine-washable at a maximum 30°C.

In Use

I've had this hoodie since the London International Dive Show and it's hardly been off my back. I've found it ideal as a layer underneath quilted jackets in the freezing late February weather and worn over a T-shirt as pre-dive wear when putting my kit together or stripping it down after a hot post-dive cuppa.

SPECS

HOODIE PRICE ›› **Men's £90, women's £80**
COLOUR ›› **Grey**
SIZES ›› **S, M, L, XL**
DIVER GUIDE - ★★★★★★★★★★

TOWEL PRICE ›› **£15**
MATERIAL ›› **100% polyester microfibre**
COLOUR ›› **Black**
SIZE ›› **92 x 49cm**
CONTACT ›› **www.divesangha.com**
DIVER GUIDE - ★★★★★★★★★★

It's been through the washing machine a dozen or so times and still looks and feels fabulous. The Hung Dry system works too, allowing the garment to be hooked up to dry in windy conditions without the fear of it blowing away.

Towel Design

As an underwater photographer I regard microfibre towels as essential accessories. I use them to lay my camera gear on during assembly and disassembly, and most importantly to wipe down the housing and port glass post-dive.

Microfibre leaves no unwanted fibres on the glass or O-ring grooves, is super-absorbent and gives a streak-free finish with no residue to dry and leave calcified water marks on the optics.

Divesangha's towel has proved to be an ideal companion to my imaging arsenal – black with the logo embroidered in orange and featuring the Hung Dry system.

Conclusion

Lucia and Tom Keen, the brains behind Divesangha, are both divers focused on designing apparel that identifies the wearer as part of our unique community, and their hoodie does just that, and is smart, comfortable and practical. A free roll-top dry bag is included with every clothing order. ■

NORTHERN DIVER

Our brand new range of Voyager bags has landed.

Made for divers. Built to last. All bases covered.

There's far too many features to mention here.
Head to our website to find your Voyager.

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www.macwet.com

NEW BUT UNTESTED

The latest kit to hit the dive shops

Sharkskin Performance Duffels

Australian technical-apparel maker Sharkskin has released two new watertight roll-top bags. Its 40L duffel dry-bag has lateral and longitudinal fastening and heavy-duty carrying handles, while the 30L dry-backpack offers single-buckle fastening and adjustable shoulder-, sternum- and waist-straps. Both bags are constructed from HD-welded PVC and they are priced at £75 each.

www.liquidsports.co.uk



Leak Insure GoStrips

Leak Insure's new Ultra Absorbent Strips for GoPro and other underwater cameras are said to contain fast-acting highly absorbent granules that can absorb 400 times their own weight in water. The maker says that if installed in a housing they can buy time in the event of a leak, with indicator ink flagging up the problem to the diver. Each reusable 42 x 29mm GoStrip is said to be able to absorb up to 15ml of sea water. A 16-strip pack costs £10.

www.leakinsure.co.uk





Bare X-Mission Tech Drysuit

Bare's X-Mission drysuit has been designed for technical diving. It's built using a flexible 350g/sq m nylon RipStop trilaminate and weighs in at 3.4kg. The suit has TiZip Masterseal diagonal front entry with a protective zipper flap, telescoping torso, field-replaceable crotch-strap and suspenders. All seams feature two-needle "Felled Seam" construction with reinforced critical wear points. The X-Mission costs just under £1530.

www.baresports.com

Buddy Watcher Communication System

The German-made Buddy Watcher diver-communication system employs ultrasound technology to establish direct contact between two divers. Easily recognised vibration and LED alerts can be transmitted at the push of the call-button from as far as 20m away, it says. The sealed batteries can be recharged via USB adaptors and wet connections. Buddy Watcher claims that its product will see off annoying rattles and tank-clangers, at a price of 240 euros a pair.

www.buddy-watcher.de





G-Drive ATC All-Terrain Portable Hard Drives

G-Technology has added new "travel-tough" external data storage solutions to its line-up of external hard drives. Included is the G-Drive ev ATC model set inside an all-terrain case (ATC) with tethered Thunderbolt or USB 3.0 cables. The 7200rpm drive is said to maximise transfer speeds. Of interest to travelling underwater photographers, the All-Terrain case provides protection from pressure, shock, dust and water. It is formatted for Mac but can be reformatted for Windows. The 1TB ev ATC with Thunderbolt is priced at £180 and the USB 3.0 version at £140.

www.g-technology.com



Cressi Newton Computer ◆◆◆◆

Italian dive-gear maker Cressi has released its latest watch-sized dive computer. The Newton has a case diameter of 48mm with four push-buttons accessing the functions including time, calendar, stopwatch and alarm clock in watch mode, plus gauge, air and nitrox in dive mode. The computer also features planning and memory functions for history and logbook. The Newton uses a dual-mixture RGBM algorithm developed in collaboration with Cressi and Bruce Wienke and has five colour accent options. It costs £379.

▸▸ **www.cressi.co.uk**





Divesangha Après Dive Poncho ◆◆◆◆

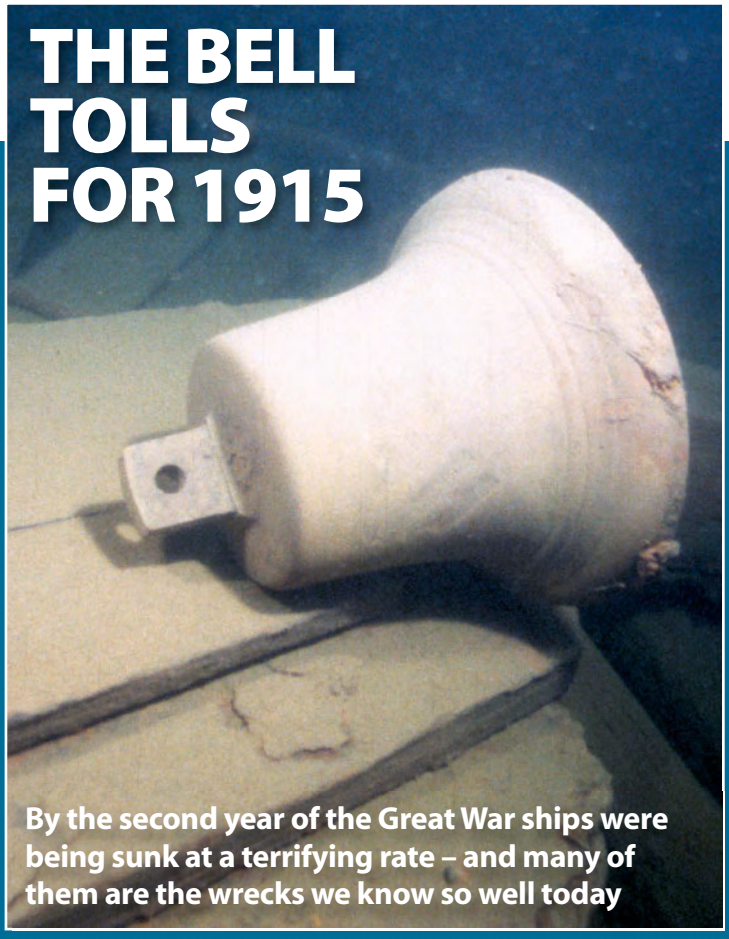
UK dive apparel-maker Divesangha has released a "one-size-fits-all" poncho for after-dive privacy when changing. Made from a soft quick-dry polyester / polymide mix microfibre fabric, the poncho has a hood, front pocket, embroidered livery and Divesangha's own trademark Hung Dry system. It also comes with a waterproof double-compartment bag. The Divesangha Poncho costs £60.

▸▸ **www.divesangha.com**

APD Dual Black DSMBs ◆◆◆◆

Ambient Pressure Diving says it has taken account of research findings into the best colours for diver-location devices before releasing two new delayed SMB models. Both employ black and either fluorescent red or yellow split colouring. Optional inflation systems are available for the self-sealing marker buoys. Expect to pay £32 for the standard model, £60 with an Easifil adaptor and £110 with a DIN inflation cylinder.

▸▸ **www.apdiving.com**



THE BELL TOLLS FOR 1915

By the second year of the Great War ships were being sunk at a terrifying rate – and many of them are the wrecks we know so well today

JOHN LIDDIARD

NEXT ISSUE

DOWN IN THE MINES
Cave-dives with a difference, from Mons to St Louis

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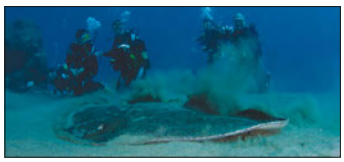
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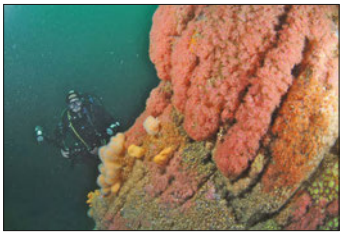
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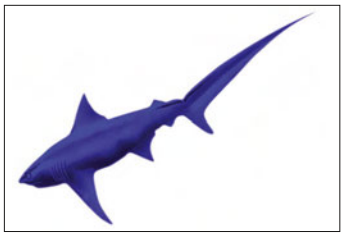
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Braintree Riverside Sub Aqua Club based in Braintree, Essex. A friendly club, we welcome divers of all abilities and have an active diving and social programme. Come and join us! email: denise.f.wright2@btinternet.com www.braintreeriversidesac.co.uk (52195)

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Chelmsford and District SAC meet at 8pm every Friday at Riverside Pool. New and qualified divers are welcome. See our website for details: www.chelmsforddiveclub.co.uk (54137)

Cheshire. Icicle Divers SAA club. Meet every Monday evening 9pm at Crewe Pool, Flag Lane. New and experienced divers welcome. Try Dives available. www.icicledivers.com (50230)

Chingford, London BSAC 365. Friendly and active club welcomes divers from all agencies and trainees. Meet Wednesday 8pm, Larkswood Leisure Centre E4 9EY. Information: www.dive365.co.uk Email: loughtondivers365@gmail.com (50989)

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Colchester Sub-Aqua Club welcomes experienced divers and beginners. Sub-Aqua Association training. Diving at home and abroad. Meets at Leisure World Friday evenings. Contact Tony (01787) 475803. (51476)

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Ealing SAC, BSAC 514. Friendly, active club, own RIBs; welcomes new and experienced divers. Meets Highgrove Pool, Eastcote, Tuesday nights 8.30pm. www.esac.org.uk (50491)

East Cheshire Sub Aqua. Macclesfield based BSAC club. Clubhouse, bar, two RIBs, minibus, nitrox, compressor. Lower Bank Street, Macclesfield, SK11 7HL. Tel: (01625) 502367. www.scubadivingmacclesfield.com (48283)

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Ellon Sub Aqua Club, Aberdeenshire, welcomes newcomers and experienced divers. We dive year round and meet on Thursday evenings. Contact www.ellonsubaquaclub.co.uk (48196)

Flintshire Sub Aqua Club based in Holywell, Flintshire, welcomes new and experienced divers from all agencies. Full dive programme. Meet Wednesdays. See us at www.flintsac.co.uk or call (01352) 731425. (42613)

Haslemere Sub Aqua Club based at Haslemere, Surrey, friendly active club welcomes new and experienced divers, offers full training. Meets Thursday nights. Contact Mike 07754 968297. (44702)

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Liverpool WAPSAC. Friendly, active training club based at Knowsley Leisure Park, L34. Welcomes new and experienced divers. Weekly meetings.Contact John: 07833 647134 or @WAPSAC (56326)

Llantrisant SAC, two RIBs, towing vehicle, welcomes new and experienced divers. Meet at Llantrisant Leisure Centre 8pm Mondays. Contact Phil: (01443) 227667. www.llantrisantdivers.com (54589)

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Nekton SAC. Based in Bromley, we are a friendly and active SAA Club that welcomes experienced and new divers alike. Info@nekton.org.uk or call Steve: 020 8467 4599.(50563)

Nemo Diving Club. Small friendly dive club offering dive trips and training for non/experienced divers in Retford and surrounding areas. Contact: www.nemodiver training.co.uk (43449)

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Orkney SAC. Small, friendly active dive club, based in Kirkwall, welcomes divers of any level or club. Own RIB and compressor. Contact Craig: 07888 690 986 or email: craigbarclay31@hotmail.com (44585)

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Reading BSAC28 offers an active, friendly diving club. Open to all grades and agencies. Pool training Mondays, club night Thursdays. www.rbsac.org.uk Email: rbsacinfo@gmail.com Tel: Sue 07772 172 575. (43317)

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Rochdale Sub-Aqua Club. Beginners and experienced divers welcome. Full training provided. Pool session every Wednesday. Club has two boats. Info at www.Rochdale Divers.co.uk or call Mick 07951 834 903. (47758)

Ruislip & Northwood BSAC. Friendly, active club, RIB, welcomes new and qualified divers. Meets Highgrove Pool Thursday nights 8.30pm. www.rnbsac.co.uk Tel: 07843 738 646 for details. (49374)

Scotland Plug Divers. Small, friendly dive club welcomes newly qualified and experienced divers to join us. Regular hardboat diving around Bass Rock/Firth of Forth/Eyemouth and trips abroad. Tel George: 07793 018 540. Email: plugdivers@btinternet.com (41282)

Selby Aquanauts SAA 1117. Family friendly club, welcomes new and qualified divers. Regular trips UK & abroad. Meet every Thursday, Albion Vaults, Selby at 9pm. Contact Mark: 07831 295 655. (43863)

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South Coast Divers (SAA 1150) Portsmouth. A friendly and active club welcomes new and experienced divers from all agencies. Email: southcoastdivers@hotmail.co.uk or call Darren: 07449 794 804. (51238)

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Steyning Scuba Club, West Sussex. All divers welcome. Steyning Pool , Monday evenings at 8.30pm. Contact Andy Willett on 07786 243 763. www.seaurchindivers@hotmail.co.uk (51627)

Sutton Coldfield SAC, friendly BSAC club, welcomes all divers from trainee to advanced. All agencies. Own RIBs and compressor. Meet every Wednesday, 8.15pm at Wyndley (3.4m pool). For free try-dive call Alan: 07970 573638 or Mark: 07787 106191. (45698)

Swanley Sub-Aqua Club: Friendly, active dive club with club RIB. Pool sessions Monday 9pm at White Oaks Leisure Centre, Swanley. PADI training, Open Water to Rescue Diver for members. Contact Karl: training@swanley subaqua.co.uk (55092)

Teddington SAC at Teddington Pool, Wednesdays 21.00. Training and good social side. Diving near and far. Tel: 07951 064448 or email: deepexplorer@blueyonder.co.uk (46917)

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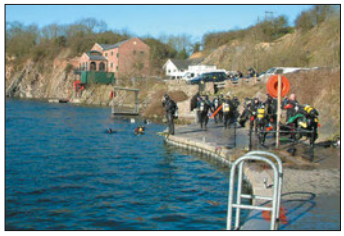
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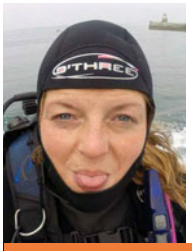
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‘Great, we’ve got a tea-maker on board!’

Yes, it’s 2015, so were you under the impression that casual sexism had died out? Instructor LOUISE FORSE is here to tell you it really hasn’t – and why she can’t accept that diving is anything but a female sport!

“GREAT, WE’VE GOT A TEA-MAKER on board! Get the kettle on, luv!” This, unfortunately, is typical of the comments that I, as a female diver, have to endure from the moment I step aboard a dive-boat filled with middle-aged, testosterone-fuelled divers.

“Will you be OK diving the *M2* at 30m?” I am asked. “Are you feeling sick, because the sea is a bit choppy today, luv?”

What is my reaction? Smile sweetly and ask if they’d like one lump or two?

No, I throw a teabag at his head and tell him to make his own goddam tea.

Do I call off the 30m dive out of fear that perhaps I’m not tough enough? No, I dive and later show sympathy for those divers who made it 15m down the shotline before freaking out at the lack of vis and darkness while I wave politely as I pass them on my way down.

Do I suffer a washing-machine journey with my head over the side of the boat, technicolour-yawning into the sea? No, but I laugh at the team of burly men who do.

So what does this tell you? Why, even in this day and age, is diving still considered a male sport?

Let’s think about this for a minute. Diving should if anything be considered a *female* sport!



THINK OF ALL THE MULTI-TASKING that’s involved, the delicacy it takes to keep away from fragile coral while taking that stunning picture, the flexibility it takes to put on all that dive-kit without asking for help, the compassion that females have for our Mother Earth while having to watch Man’s destruction!

It is not thought of as manly to go looking for beautiful butterflies or diddy ladybugs, yet it’s OK to hunt out teeny pink and yellow nudibranchs and pygmy seahorses.

So what makes diving a man’s world? One word: Adventure. And adventure is a man’s game.

I recently listened to a talk given by Monty Halls at the London International Dive Show about a recent “adventure” that he had organised. He willingly admitted that to be chosen to join in, you had to have a “hairy arse”.

I myself *do* have a bit of a fuzzy bottom, (a fact on which my husband will back me up!) so is it really a case of being a man, or is it still just a boy’s club. I fear it is the latter.

I have had to listen to the sort of comments I outlined at the start of this column since I started diving nearly two years ago. I forever seem to be listening to men telling me that they have been diving for 15 years and clocked up 150 dives.

They soon shut up when I tell them that I had completed more than 230 dives in 18 months. Stick that in your pipe and smoke it!

Fortunately for me, I was brought up to be a confident person but I worry about the quieter type of female diver. I wonder if all this male bravado is the reason that not so many girls dive, continue to dive or refuse to dive with anyone other than their husband or partner?

In my case, I can’t stand diving with my husband. We have been told that we are the only couple who can have a full blown argument under water and still understand each other!

All this grief gave rise to an idea I had last year, to start an all-female dive club. I envisioned a dive-club for all those fellow local dive-girls who had admitted to me that sometimes they were intimidated by the sort of behaviour I have described.

After some thought about names and logos, we called ourselves Scuba Hoes Dive Club, with a pin-up girl in scuba kit as our logo.

I have always seen the old 1950s pin-up girls as early girl-power ladies, and feel that they project a strong character. Yes it is a little bit non-PC, but we wanted something that would show toughness, solidarity and girl power – and be memorable.

I decided to organise an all-girls’ dive last year, I booked the boat *X-Dream* through Old Harbour Dive Centre in Weymouth for the day and we headed out to sea for our journey.

I HAVE TO SAY THAT the whole adventure was a success! It was a beautiful sunny day, vis was about 5m (trust me, in Weymouth, that was good for last year what with the Solent being dredged).

We made friends with each other, asked for help from each other without the fear of being judged as weak, we got changed in and out of our gear without the fear of being ogled and, most importantly, we had a bloody good laugh.

After our day out, the skipper Nigel Holder brought us a bottle of champers and told us it was a job well done, and that he hoped to see more all-girl dives in the future.

While at the London International Dive Show this year I spoke to a wide variety of female divers who agreed with my vision, and loved the idea of being able to go diving with like-minded girls.

So what now? That’s the question. I say, let’s have a “Scuba Hoes” club in every port in every town in every country!

Let’s get these females feeling there is somewhere they can go without feeling like a lost little girl who should be in the galley making the tea.

Let’s get some camaraderie going on, and let’s stand up to those men who still think that diving is really a man’s sport!


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